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# THE JESSAMINES

MRS. C. E. BROYLES

Broyles
NBO

# THE JESSAMINES

# The Jessamines

*(A New Story of the Old South)*

By

MRS. C. E. BROYLES

1921

THE STRATFORD COMPANY, *Publishers*

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*TO*

*The Memory of My Deceased Husband*

**C. E. Broyles**

*Who First Encouraged the Writing of this Story*

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## CONTENTS


| CHAPTER | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| I. | The Passing of Nellie Nultee | 1 |
| II. | Mammy Dilsey's "March Through Georgia" | 11 |
| III. | "Babies Is Babies" | 16 |
| IV. | "Our Ol' Home" | 21 |
| V. | "Jeff Davis" to the Rescue | 26 |
| VI. | Her Name Is Ray Harrison | 30 |
| VII. | Mammy Dilsey Administers Mullin Tea | 34 |
| VIII. | "Turnouts and B'reavements" | 41 |
| IX. | Mammy Dilsey Crosses Jordan | 50 |
| X. | Uncle Jess in Need | 53 |
| XI. | Dr. Warren Solves a Problem | 58 |
| XII. | The Cabinet Rescued | 62 |
| XIII. | Mirandy West Acts as Hostess | 68 |
| XIV. | The Moonshiner | 76 |
| XV. | "Welcome Home!" | 81 |
| XVI. | "In the Ages to Come" | 88 |
| XVII. | Youth | 93 |
| XVIII. | Bowlegs | 100 |
| XIX. | "Free, Or a Hunderd" | 107 |
| XX. | Shelley's "Cloud" | 114 |
| XXI. | The Jessamines in Jeopardy | 121 |

CONTENTS


XXII. The Richton Hanging . . . . . 124
XXIII. "Billie Boy and Charming Billie" . . . 134
XXIV. Brother Andrew . . . . . 139
XXV. The Fever Epidemic . . . . . 142
XXVI. Dr. Warren's Love . . . . . 148
XXVII. The Man Named Hix . . . . . 154
XXVIII. The Green-Eyed Monster . . . . 158
XXIX. "Marriage? Marriage?" . . . . . 163
XXX. Reba's Love Dream . . . . . 167
XXXI. Paul Odell Has an Experience . . . . 169
XXXII. The Screech-Owl . . . . . 173
XXXIII. Aunt Lydia . . . . . 181
XXXIV. Off to College . . . . . 184
XXXV. Hallowe'en at Whitfield . . . . . 187
XXXVI. The Christmas Wedding . . . . . 191
XXXVII. The Bruised Rose . . . . . 195
XXXVIII. Absence . . . . . 201
XXXIX. The Thunder-Storm . . . . . 211
XL. The Cabinet's Secret . . . . . 215
XLI. "Balm in Gilead" . . . . . 220
XLII. Explanations . . . . . 224
XLIII. Paul and Alma . . . . . 227
XLIV. "Diamond Cut Diamond" . . . . 231
XLV. Jamie West . . . . . 236
XLVI. Mockingbirds and Moonbeams . . . . 241

## CHAPTER I

## THE PASSING OF NELLIE NULTEE

LATE one afternoon in the spring of 1865 a cavalryman from the rear guard of Sherman's army halted in front of a residence of middle Georgia, which was somewhat superior to the homes of other wealthy planters of that time and that section.

Around the large yard ran a low stone wall, and over the double front gates was reared a handsome granite arch, bearing in letters of bronze the name of the home — THE JESSAMINES. The house, a splendid, two-story structure, was of Colonial style with broad verandas and tall fluted columns. According to the taste of that period it was painted white. Green latticed blinds closed over the windows, proclaiming the vacancy of the silent house. Several majestic oak trees stood here and there, accentuating the stately dignity of the place. However, blooming cape jessamines, which grew on every hand constituting the crowning glory of the place, offered relief to the otherwise all-pervading austerity. They formed a hedge around the entire yard, and bordered the white sandy walk from gate to veranda.

At this particular time the bushes were clad in a new growth of delicate green, which furnished a perfect background for the innumerable white buds, whose velvety petals filled the air with perfume, only withholding that surfeiting sweetness of the fully matured blossom. It was this lovely Southern flower that appealed to the blue-coated stranger, and

caused him to turn aside, while his companions pressed forward to the camp, some two miles beyond. His imagination gave the white blooms the purport of flags of truce. So he urged his horse still nearer until the projecting limbs embraced him, while the sweet blossoms in their tender caresses gave him a singular sense of paradisaic peace and beauty.

The influence was almost narcotic. He became oblivious to the passage of time. But, finally, the impatient whinny of his horse reminded him of the camp and the rapidly approaching twilight. With one hand he caught the loosened rein, and with the other broke one of the flowers. Then a gloom overcast his face. The jessamines reminded him of a death scene, in which a Confederate soldier talked wistfully of these flowers. He remembered how he had spoken so tenderly of "Nellie and The Jessamines."

Distinctly he remembered every detail connected with that death, from the moment the bleeding form was brought from the battlefield to the following morning when the lifeless body was borne from the hospital tent by the negro servant, whose trembling lips murmured — "He was de las of our fo'ks, an' now Miss Nellie's all alone in de worl'."

"He'p! He'p! My baby — my baby is dyin'." And a terrible shriek shocked the twilight stillness, as a white-turbaned negress rushed out, wringing her hands, and screaming — "My baby! my baby is dyin'."

The cavalryman leapt from his horse, rushed up the walk, and followed the terrified negress as she re-entered the house. They passed through a darkened hallway to a dimly lighted back room, where the newcomer expected to find a little pickaninny enveloped in flames. But, instead, he saw a young woman of the fairest blonde type writhing in convulsions. He went straight to the bedside, and, seizing a spoon

from a table nearby, inserted it between the sufferer's teeth. He then caught her hands, and held them with a firm pressure. They were icy cold, though her face was burning with fever.

The spasm passed, leaving no consciousness in the eyes that turned on the benefactor.

"How long has this girl been sick?" he asked abruptly.

The negress, who was on her knees with her face buried in her hands, sprang to her feet, and with a dazed, questioning look remained silent. Loss of sleep and excessive anxiety were at last telling on her iron constitution. For a week she had watched day and night by the bedside of her young mistress, occupying the position of both nurse and companion, one moment soothing and caressing a frightened child, the next encouraging and cheering a despondent woman.

She was again questioned.

"How long has this girl been sick?"

"She been sick a week, I b'lieve. Yassir, she been sick one week."

"Where is her physician? Why is he not here?"

"Dr. Black done gone to Mooreville, an' de neighbors — dey refugeed long ago. She aint got no kinfo'ks, 'cep' her husband an' her brother, an' dey's bof in de war."

"But, do you understand that she is desperately ill, and that you are compelled to have help?"

"Yassir, I knows she's pow'ful sick, but dar aint nobody ter he'p but de Lord, an' I been acallin' on Him 'til my knees is sore. But nobody 'tall comes."

The negress looked tired and sorrowful.

The stranger was touched to the quick. Looking from the negress to the white-clad form on the bed, he said,

"I'm a physician. Don't worry. We'll do what we can for her."

"You a doctor? La, honey, you ain't nothin' but a boy." But hope was kindled in the breaking heart, and her voice gave evidence thereof.

"Yes, I'm only a boy in years, but I'm better than no help at all."

Then with every evidence of doubt vanishing from her face, and followed by a light that actually transfigured it, the negress clasped her hands, and fell again to her knees. With vibrant voice she sent up a prayer of thanksgiving, that touched the heart and dimmed the eyes of the listener. In the faith of a little child she accepted the soldier-doctor as the answer to her prayers, disregarding the human agency of her own cry.

Straightway a thorough understanding was established between physician and nurse, and he soon learned that she was by no means as ignorant of her duties as he had supposed.

But their united efforts could not relieve the patient. As a physician he desired to make some inquiries concerning the sufferer, but as a man his delicate sense of propriety caused him to shrink from a knowledge she might wish to withhold from a stranger. However, his unasked question was answered by a gentle wail from a bed in the opposite corner.

"How old is the baby?" he asked

"She'll be one week ol' termorrer."

There was a plain gold band on the hand that he pressed. and the soldier-doctor wondered if it had not borne too heavily about the delicate finger.

As night wore on her fever increased, and her parched lips called incessantly for the absent husband, while the pathos of her entreaties almost unmanned the physician by her side. Many times during the night she screamed in delirium. At

such times the negress would enfold the slight form in her arms, and sooth her by the endearing terms of "Mammy's chil', Mammy's baby." Then she would lay her back only to go through the heartrending duty again and again.

For hours the sedatives produced no effect but finally there was a slight diminution of the fever, and the paroxysms grew lighter. With his finger pressed on the rapidly beating pulse the doctor dropped his head upon his arm. Then the negress turned to the other bed, and, after lifting the wakened babe, tip-toed to the kitchen where logs were blazing in a large, old-fashioned fireplace.

The infant was fed, and put to sleep in a little crib. But, without giving herself a moment's rest, the negress began moving around the room in the preparation of a midnight meal for the stranger. Her lips never parted but from them issued that wordless song, so peculiar to her race. It stole on the ears of the semi-conscious doctor like the sweet, far-off melody of a dream, gradually deepening into strains of ineffable sadness, uncanny in its spiritual significance.

The doctor had fallen asleep when she returned, with his head at an odd angle over his chest.

"Wake up, Marsar, an' eat dis vit'ls," was whispered into his ear, and he was immediately awakened. "Eat it, honey, fer I knows you's hongry."

This was quite true, and his appetite was increased tenfold by the savory odor of the food spread before him. The old nurse had prepared, as few others could have done, some fried chicken, crisp waffles, and sassafras tea, the South being deprived of the luxury of coffee.

As he ate the much-needed food he inquired in the soft, sick-room monotone as to the cause of the convulsion and

change for the worse in the patient. He was told that Dr. Black, the family friend and physician, not being satisfied with the condition of her mistress, had decided to go to Mooreville for consultation and medicine, and that he must travel twenty of the forty miles by private conveyance before the nearest railroad station could be reached. When leaving early that morning he had ordered the house kept perfectly quiet during his twenty-four hours absence, promising to send the mail and a sedative by his office-boy.

The negress, to carry out his instructions literally, had ordered the house servants off to the negro quarters a mile away with the command — not to show their faces there until "in de mornin'." Late in the afternoon, needing milk for the baby, she had slipped out into the pasture back of the house. As she was returning with the milk she had seen Sam, Dr. Black's boy, driving off. Hurrying into the sick-room, she had found her mistress in the condition already described.

Pushing the tray aside, the physician turned to the patient with a deeper expression of perplexity, and drew his hand nervously through his dark auburn hair. The negress had left the room, presently returning with the infant, whom she again placed in its bed.

"Bring a blanket," whispered the doctor, and, as he caught the clenched hand of the woman, which had heretofore remained unnoticed, to place it under the cover, he felt the fingers relax, and into his own dropped a piece of crushed paper.

"Not this! Oh, God, not this!" His face turned as white as the one on the pillow. But there before his eyes was a letter written by his own hand some six months before.

He read,—

Mrs. Nellie Nultee,

Dear Madam,

By his servant's request I write to tell you of your husband's death. He was mortally wounded in yesterday's battle, and died one hour ago.

Yours in sympathy,

T. J. WARREN,

*Physician in charge.*"

Owing to the prolonged sickness and the final death of the negro servant the letter had been delayed, but, at last, had found its way into a little mountain post-office, and started on again. By some strange misfortune it had reached its destination at the most inopportune moment of the whole six months. The negress being out enabled the boy to enter the sick-room, and to place the letter in reach of the patient at a time when her life hung by such a precarious tenure, that a shock of either joy or sorrow would inevitably prove fatal. But, as if predestined and doubly doomed, she had received both, and, opening her eyes from troubled sleep, had recognized the well-known handwriting of her husband, who had carefully directed the envelope before the fatal battle.

With a cry of joy she had seized it, hugging the letter to her wildly beating heart. Prudence had been thrown to the winds, sickness and baby forgotten. Amid hysterical laughter the seal had been broken to liberate the love-message, and trembling fingers had drawn out the piece of paper. Then the hungry eyes had read the horrible message it contained.

As the doctor looked at the letter, realizing its effect, he crushed it, and let it drop to the floor. On doing so he met the wide-opened, accusing eyes of the sufferer. Sinking into a chair, he lifted the restless hand of Nellie Nultee, and placed it in the open palm of his own.

"Poor child, poor widowed child," he whispered as the blue eyes still gazed into his own, struggling to ask a question the lips were powerless to frame.

Replacing the hand, as though it were too sacred for his touch, he stepped over to the large window, and pushed open the blinds. The jessamine-freighted atmosphere swept over his hot brow, and filled the room like a holy incense. The flickering candle-light played over the pale face of the lovely child-woman.

As morning approached more blankets were called for, and hot-water bottles applied, but without effect. Doctor and nurse were unremitting in their efforts.

Of a sudden the doctor stood erect, as if impelled by an inspiration. Slipping to the other bed, he took the sleeping babe, and placed it in its mother's arms, hoping its tiny body might emit the spark to which her waning vitality might respond.

As the dark-haired babe rested on the bosom of its mother they formed a picture of such beauty that it was stamped indelibly on the stranger's mind. However, the mother failed to respond to this last resort. Taking the babe from the unresisting arms, he imprinted on the velvety cheek a kiss for its dying mother and another for its dead father. Then he laid it gently in the negress' lap.

All this time the black face had followed him in agonizing appeal. She knew the moment hope was over, but no sound escaped her lips. She had suffered too much for outcry, but the tears coursing down her cheeks told the story of her aching heart. She loved her young mistress above everything else. She had received her into her affections at her infancy, and for seventeen years had served her with a devotion understood by but few.

The doctor, having learned something of this peculiar love during the night, and seeing the agony in her face, caught the black hand, and pressed it sympathetically.

After much hesitation he told her of her master's death. The story, however, made little impression on her overstrained mind. Even the babe was held mechanically, if not unconsciously, her gaze being centered on the face of her dying mistress.

Fearing for the safety of the little one, the doctor again took it into his own arms. As he pressed the tiny form to his heart a feeling of pity took possession of him. Her helplessness appealed to him as nothing had ever done before. Without weighing consequences he asked,

"May I have this baby?"

"Have Miss Nellie's baby?" gasped the old negress in consternation.

She was assured that a good home would be provided for herself and the baby. But his offer was unhesitatingly declined.

"Miss Nellie done tol' me she's gwine ter die, an' if Marse George didn' come back, fer mer ter tak de baby back to our ol' home, an' give her ter her brother. An' dat's what I'se gwine ter do."

"But you say Mrs. Nultee's brother is in the war. How do you know but that he, too, may fail to get back?"

However, this and all other suggestions were powerless to change her resolution.

"I'se sho ter do what I tol' her I'd do," she declared.

Then the doctor kissed the orphaned baby girl, and, laying her on the bed, drew from his pocket a costly folding-cup, and slipped the jeweled handle over one of the fingers. Turning to the negress, he said,

"If this baby ever needs a friend, call for me, and I shall come, even from the end of the world. My name and address are on the cup. It was a gift from my mother, and I never thought to part with it, but. . ." As if hearing a call he turned to the other bed, and met the appealing gaze of the baby's mother. In the depths of her eyes was a question, a request, a command so urgent, that he stepped to her side, and asked,

"What is it, Mrs. Nultee?"

But the spirit with its wish had passed.

With a pitiable moan the negress buried her face in her hands, and swayed from side to side. The doctor stood motionless, looking upon the lifeless form, which suggested a rare, delicate chalice, drained of its sacrificial wine.

As he stood thus the first rays of morning light crept in, and rested on a pictured face above the bed, which he now saw for the first time.

"Ah," he sighed, "how like, and yet unlike, that other face." Again his thoughts reverted to the dead face in the hospital tent, and "Nellie and The Jessamines" suggested a deeper pathos.

The doctor's troubled, apologetic gaze shifted from the boyish face of the husband above the bed to the lovely, classic features of the wife below. Then he took one last long look into each of the faces, as if searching for an explanation of the mystery in which fate had associated him with the tragic closing of their life drama. But his closest scrutiny could not penetrate the veil, hung by the hand of providence.

Hearing the approaching servants, and knowing Dr. Black would soon return, he moved to the door, and left without a further word.

With bowed head he walked down the jessamine-bordered walk, and hastened to the war-weary camp, where he knew his horse awaited him.

## CHAPTER II

## MAMMY DILSEY'S "MARCH THROUGH GEORGIA"

SIX weeks later the faithful negress left The Jessamines forever. With the baby in one arm and a large bundle swung over the other she startled on foot for the "ol' home," many miles away.

And the fact that she was without money or traveling experience caused her no misgivings. Having arranged every detail to the best of her ability, and, seeing no other alternative but to walk, she started with the cheerfulness that has ever characterized her people, and enabled them to triumph over difficulties that would prostrate the superior race. The faculty for reaching out after trouble has no place in the negro organism. They waste no vital force in "crossing the bridge before getting to it." Mammy knew that she had food and raiment sufficient for the present. The future she left to solve its own difficulties.

Her journey was even a more serious undertaking than it might have been, in that she passed directly over the route of Sherman's army, where the monogram of that federal general had been written with a flaming torch, leaving an ashheap scroll to besmirch the record of civilized warfare. Sometimes there would be miles without a sign of habitation.

However, at intervals, a home would be left — sometimes a cabin, sometimes a mansion — but, whether cabin or mansion, opened doors offered equal hospitality to negress and babe.

All felt the poverty of that year, but the little was freely shared. No call for milk on the part of the solicitous Mammy was refused, though to some it meant the sacrifice of the giver's meal.

And, strange to say, the infant took to the peregrinacious life like a gypsy, and grew in stature and beauty. She seemed to realize that her charms constituted their stock in trade, and freely bartered smiles and kisses for food and raiment.

At dusk one afternoon the negress knocked at one of those beautiful old homes below Mooreville, in the middle part of the state, and requested a night's lodging for her "mistress."

"Why certainly," responded the lady, who met her at the door, "but where is your mistress?" And she was glancing down the carriage driveway.

"Here she is." A white handkerchief was lifted, revealing the sleeping babe.

"Bless the little darling!" cried the elegant middle-aged lady, whom Mammy soon learned to call Mrs. Gray.

Taking the little one into her own arms, the hostess led the way into the sitting-room.

"What is its name?" she asked, removing the cap, and smoothing the dark hair.

"We aint named her yet. She aint got no ma an' pa. Her pa done died in de war, an her ma. . . ."

"Yes, I see."

There were tears in Mammy's eyes. She was tired.

When composure was restored the negress related the pathetic details of the baby's orphanage, which on this and on all following occasions won for herself and the babe the deepest sympathy and tenderest care.

Mrs. Gray, learning that the negress' feet were blistered, insisted on her remaining for a week to recuperate her

strength. The invitation was gladly accepted, and, at the expiration of the time, a permanent home was offered. Thus had the door of fortune swung open a second time to the little orphan.

But, as before, the offer was declined.

"I's 'bleeged ter tak dat chil' ter our ol' home, an' give her inter de arms dat I promised her ma I'd do," was the firm answer to every entreaty.

When the morning of departure arrived Mrs. Gray took the two-months old babe into her lap, and placed a dainty new cap on her head. As the strings were drawn under the chubby chin a deep dimple appeared in the left cheek, and the pink lips parted in a smile.

"Little darling!" cried Mrs. Gray, drawing the little one to her breast.

The negress looked on with stoical expression, finally asserting,

"Dat aint nothin'. Her ma could laugh out loud when she wa'n't no older'n her."

Then a pure, gurgling noise issued from the rosebud mouth, manifesting all the charm and sweetness of a baby's first laugh. It was strangely akin to the first spring zephyr, aroused from its bed of violets.

With the recognition of the unexpected sound an approving expression forced its way into the lines of the black face. But, as if ashamed of her momentary weakness, Mammy remarked,

"Well, she aint got but one dimple, an' her ma had two."

Then, taking the baby into her arms, and with the bundle on her head, she gave a graceful courtesy to her hostess, glided out, and was gone. . . .

Mammy kept the little one spotlessly clean, and was secretly very proud of her winning appearance, although deep down in her heart she had never fully exonerated her for the mother's death. The infant had not received from her those endearing little nothings, that constitute the birthright of babyhood.

However, that state of affairs was brought to a speedy close one day by the negress becoming aware of an unusual and puzzling expression on the baby's face. The child was in the throes of one of those terrible attacks, so fatal to infant life. Mammy felt sure that it was death, and the thought of the future without the baby appalled her. It was then that she realized what the little one had become to her. With this knowledge came the desire to make amends, and on the little suffering face were lavished caresses of extravagant solicitude, while into the unheeding ears was poured a cataclysm of apologies and endearing terms. She concluded with,

"Yes, honey, you is Mammy's chil'—Mammy's own baby chil'." And with this last confession she signed away her recently acquired freedom. Henceforth, Nellie Nultee's child owned a slave, that no presidential proclamation could liberate.

The attack left as suddenly as it had come, and nothing remained to indicate its recent presence but a better understanding between babe and nurse.

By midsummer the doll-like clothes were all awry, the sleeves to short and tight, the skirts too long and wide. So the next hostess, reminded of these defects by alluring gestures of hampered arms and spasmodic appeals of hampered feet, straightway invaded a chest of ante-bellum finery.

A few days later the little conspirator emerged bedecked in thread lace and fine linen, made up in a style befitting her advanced age. And with the dainty outfit was furnished a strong willow basket, which, for the remainder of the journey, swang over Mammy's arm in place of the abandoned bundle.

## CHAPTER III

## "BABIES IS BABIES"

OWING to the destruction of the courthouse by the invading army, a vacant storeroom had been utilized, and the fall term of court was in session in a small village of South Georgia, with Judge Gary Elbert on the bench.

The Judge was one of those several wealthy rice-planters, who built their impressive mansions in this section of Georgia. His great learning and charming manner made him a leader in social, as well as political, affairs. He was ever the cordial and courteous host to his guests, and to constituents a statesman worthy of his clan.

But, like many great men, the Judge indulged in hobbies, and at this particular time his pet theme was—"hogs, the raising of fine hogs!" On this subject he talked with all the fluency and gusto of ante-bellum days. He thought the long-eared, long-nosed razor-backs, of root-and-acorn breed, should be exterminated at one fell blow, and in their stead would spring up and flourish the corn-fed variety of the West.

"Yes," said he to some friends, accompanying him home to dinner that noon, "you must see a white la pulchra I received last night from Kansas City. Only four and a half weeks old, and weighs thirteen and a quarter pounds. Finest pedigree in America. Short, delicate ears, that alone would prove his superior breed. Aristocrat, sir, pure aristocrat from the tip end of his short nose to the extremity of his gracefully curling tail."

By this time his home was reached, but, instead of entering, he invited his guests to the backyard, where a fancy pigpen was located. However, there was a surprise awaiting the Judge and his guests. On reaching the pen they discovered that the pig was missing, leaving no clue as to its whereabouts.

Consternation took hold of the Judge. That day at dinner his manner was hurried and preoccupied, and decidedly at variance with the elegant dignity that had characterized him for sixty years.

The moment the dessert was finished he hastened with his friends back to town. But, before entering the improvised courthouse on the "square," he approached a squad of street-urchins, who were assembling for the afternoon marble game.

Describing the pig, he offered a fancy price for its capture and restoration.

Instantly the boys, ranging in age from six to twelve years and in color from jet to alabaster, started in search of the pig. Avoiding front gates, they slipped quietly into backyards, where they peeped under boxes and under barrels with a judgment that suggested a familiarity with the favorite rendezvous of lost pigs.

At the expiration of an hour their zeal was beginning to wane, when they heard a noise, between a squeak and a grunt, that electrified them. Looking across a large vacant lot on the outskirts of the town, they saw a negro woman slipping cautiously through a thick growth of trees with a white object, which they saw her put into a basket.

"Dat's him. She's hidin' him 'til night."

"Sho!" was answered in a chorus of whispers.

The boys, peeping through the fence, were trembling

with joy and excitement over their discovery of the pig, and with bated breath were formulating plans for its recovery.

After placing the basket carefully in a secluded spot, the negress moved a short distance away, and took a seat at the foot of a large tree. She was soon fast asleep.

With one accord the fascinated watchers rose from their kneeling postures, and began moving in a circuitous route toward the rear of the sleeping woman. The leader, with the soft tread of an indian, advanced and gently lifted the basket, bearing it off without disturbing the pig or the negress.

They had gone about fifty yards when the eyes of the woman opened, and rested on the vanishing forms. They failed to make an impression on her dormant faculties until the retreating basket flashed on her vision.

Instantly she sprang to her feet, and rushed in pursuit, dominated by the instinctive desire to regain her property. But, as she advanced, calling in vain for the fugitives to stop, her feelings grew more bitter. Her determination to have her own was intensified by a burning desire to catch and to throttle the captors. And by some peculiar occult communication this longing was conveyed to the consciousness of the boys, filling them with fear, and imparting a velocity to their limbs, that equaled the speed of their pursuer.

The two largest boys carried the basket, and were closely surrounded by a half-dozen smaller ones, whose one-piece suits waved on the breeze as they dashed like a cyclone into the main street. Followed by the enraged woman, they were filled with the terror of Tam o' Shanter, besieged by the witches of Alloway, as they witnessed her wild gesticulations and blearing white eyes.

Down the middle of the street, enveloped in a cloud of dust, they rushed, all unconscious of the consternation their spectacular race was creating. So close were the pursued to the pursuer, that to the bewildered onlookers they appeared as one party, bereft of reason and impelled by some phantom of madness. With agonized gaze concentrated ahead they swept through the public square, and into the courtroom without a challenge.

"Here's your pig, Jedge!" gasped the leader, clearing the door, and espying Judge Elbert on the platform opposite.

"'Tain't!" screamed the negress, springing for the uplifted basket.

"'Tis! She stol' him! We seed her!"

With this the youngsters rushed forward, dodging the outstretched arm of the woman, as she made another grab for the basket, which resulted in her falling over an obstreperous fice dog.

"Take him, Jedge! He's your white pig!" gasped the boy, thrusting the basket onto the rostrum at Judge Elbert's feet.

The Judge, still in the attitude of charging the jury, and dazed by the unprecedented procedure, said in a weak, apologetic voice,

"If it's my pig, I'll know it by its white hair and short nose."

Instantly the lid lifted from within, and the dark, curly head of a laughing baby emerged.

"Git out o' my way!" screamed the negress, breaking loose from the sheriff. Seizing the babe in one arm and the basket in the other, she hissed—"Po' white trash!" Then she stalked from the room, followed by the stupefied gaze of the court. Upon reaching the sidewalk she stumbled over

some object. Again she cried, "Git out o' my way!" And the next instant a white pig with a short nose flew into the air.

The mesmeric spell was broken. Pandemonium reigned. Without a backward glance at the yelling crowd, and with her scornful lips compressed, Mammy Dilsey moved from their midst.

Not till the dust of the town was shaken from her feet did she give further vent to her pent-up feelings. But, "gathering strength as gathers the storm, and nursing her wrath to keep it warm," she finally denounced,

"Po' white trash, acallin' Miss Nellie's baby a pig! Humph!"

Then for an hour she repeated at intervals, "Po' white trash!" her voice vibrating with each repetition in a deeper scorn, and her form assuming the bearing of an outraged priestess.

On and on she pressed without a thought of the dusk that was gathering, or the darkness soon to envelop her. The baby had laughed and jabbered as if the whole thing were a huge joke, and as the twilight vanished she looked back, waving a chubby, dimpled hand.

## CHAPTER IV

## "OUR OL' HOME"

WHEN Mammy Dilsey crossed the Savannah River, and stepped on South Carolina soil, she lifted the baby's head from her shoulder, and addressed her,

"Wake up, honey, fer it aint agwine ter be so mighty long afore we gits home an' sees Marse Dan. Yo' ol' Mammy is agittin' pow'ful tired, but we mus' hurry on, fer Marse Dan is aneedin' us. De ol' home'll be lonesome ter him 'thout his pa and Miss Nellie. Yes, honey, Marse Dan loved yo' ma jes lak she was his own sister, though she wa'n't a speck o' blood-kin ter him. His pa was yo' ma's guardeen ever since she was three year ol' an' Marse Dan was six. So de two chillum growed up tergether. His ma didn' live but a year a'ter me and yo' ma went ter his home. An' since den I's been amotherin' him jes lak I did yo' ma — dat is, 'til he went off ter de war. An' you jes ought ter have seed him de day his pa's regiment marched out o' town, fer I tell you, Marse Dan was de finest lookin' one in de bunch."

Following her loquacious outburst, Mammy Dilsey lapsed into a long silence. But the quiver of her lips and the frequent tears in her eyes showed that her mind was busy, even though her thoughts were unexpressed. Nevertheless, it was with buoyant step that she pressed onward toward the home she had left nearly two years before to follow her mistress, the young girl-bride, to the strange new home in Georgia.

For the past several days her thoughts had dwelt on the young master, who had ever held a secure place in her heart. She felt that his presence would mitigate, if it could not compensate for, the loss of her mistress.

On the second afternoon of her treading South Carolina soil she halted by the roadside, and, looking up at the sun, remarked,

"It's now 'bout two o'clock, an' we ought ter be dar in a hour's time. 'Taint but two miles. My! My! De Yankees is plum ruint dis country. Dey's burnt up every home fer miles an' miles. An', honey, I sees now we aint agwine ter find no house whar I kin wash an' dress you in. So, we'll jes go down dar by de branch. De water aint so mighty col', an' it won' be de firs' time you've had ter wash out-doors."

A little while later Mammy Dilsey held the child out at arm's length, and looked her over with a critical expression.

"Now," said she, "you's as sweet an' clean as you kin be. Yes, you'se a pow'ful lakly chil'—dar aint no gittin' roun' dat. If you jes had dem pretty blue eyes lak—. No, dar aint no chil' on de earth as pretty as she was wid her long yallow curls. Now, honey, dat's jes de way I wants you ter laugh an' look when you sees Marse Dan. When we gits ter de top o' dis hill we kin look down on de town. I used ter fetch Marse Dan an' Miss Nellie out dis road ter git wil' flowers. . . . Dis is a long road." Mammy Dilsey was dragging herself and the little one up the hill, "An' my ol' feet is so heavy dey jes drags de groun'. But we's mos' ter de top, an' de town's right dar. Jes a few mo' steps, an' we kin look down on our house an' de middle o' de town."

Mammy Dilsey was reaching the top of the hill, from which she should view the long-sought scene below.

"O, Lordy! O, Lordymighty!" she screamed on looking

over the crest, "de Yankees is done burnt up de town! An' whar's Marse Dan?"

For the first time the brave heart of Mammy Dilsey turned faint, and, with a tottering step, she made for a nearby log, there dropping down like she had received a mortal wound.

"Lord, is you done plum forsook me?" she wailed. "Is you done clean fergot all 'bout po' ol' Mammy Dilsey, what's been atrustin' You all dis time? O, Lord, I's in a mighty dark place. Won't you mak it light fer me, so I kin see which way ter go? You know, de Yankees is done burnt up de town, an' I aint got no whar ter stay. You know, de Yankees is done 'stroyed all de vit'ls, an' I aint got nothin' ter eat. But I aint acarin' so much for myself, Lord, but I's jes bleeged ter have he'p fer Miss Nellie's baby. Now, Lord, You promised ter be a Father ter de fatherless, an' You aint agwine back on Yo' word. Is You? No, I knows You aint." She was quite positive now, and her manner showed that she had been comforted. "An' I's gwine ter turn de case over ter You. Amen!" was the conclusion of her prayer.

Mammy Dilsey was shortly on her way again. Guided by the Unseen Hand, she soon found herself in the backyard of the "ol' home." There was no surprise manifested. She was confident the Lord would lead her.

"Funny I couldn' see de house fer de trees," she commented. "An' dar's Miss Lester's house, too. But dar aint no other houses in all o' Palmlee. But whar's Marse Dan? Dar aint no mo' sign o' life 'bout here dan if it was a graveyard."

Taking a seat on the back step, she placed the laughing babe in the basket at her feet.

"Now, honey, you stay here 'til I goes roun' ter de front, an' opens de door."

On reaching the front steps she came to a sudden halt, appalled by a sight that made her quake with fear.

On the veranda sat a figure, but whether dead or alive she could not tell. The emaciated face was as colorless as chalk, while from the left side dangled an empty coat sleeve. The large eyes were wide open, but as expressionless as death. Yet they drew the negress against her will. Inch by inch she moved till she stood only a few feet away. Repelled, yet fascinated by the apparition before her, she gazed into the wasted face, and saw the thin drawn lips move, finally catching the whispered words—"Mammy Dilsey."

"Marse Dan, is dat you?" And the next instant the black arms were around him, with his head pillowed on the breast, where it had found comfort in childhood. "What's dey been adoin' ter you, honey? Dey's mighty nigh kilt my chil'." Her old frame shook with sobs, and the tears gushed from her eyes, while the young master was likewise affected.

"Dat's right, honey, jes cry it out on Mammy's heart. Den you'll feel better, an' kin tell me all 'bout it."

For a few minutes there was no word spoken, as though the sudden hush were necessary and sacred. Then, lifting his head, and drying his eyes, Harrison related,

"When I first saw you I would not speak for fear you were only a creation of my fevered brain. Yes, Mammy, I've suffered. . . . For months after my arm was amputated I was more dead than alive. Had blood-poisoning and then typhoid fever. Could never have gotten home but for Uncle Jess. He stayed with me through it all, and got me here yesterday. And . . ."

"Wait a minute, Marse Dan. I be back d'rectly," interrupted Mammy.

When she returned she had the baby in her arms.

"Whose baby is that, Mammy?" asked Harrison, surprisedly.

She pulled up a chair by his side, and took a seat.

"Dis is Miss Nellie's baby, Marse Dan."

"Nellie's baby? I didn't know she left a baby. I only heard a few weeeks ago of her death. My poor little sister! But, Mammy, what are you going to do with it?" He was looking intently at the laughing, jabbering babe.

"I's gwine ter give her ter you, an' here she is," placing the little one in his lap. "Yes, Marse Dan, I tol' Miss Nellie I'd give her baby inter yo' arms, an' now I's done done it."

"But, Mammy, we can't . . ."

"Yes, we kin, Marse Dan, an' don' you pester yo'se'f 'bout her. She aint never been sick but one time in her life."

Catching one of the dimpled hands within his own, he laid his cheek against the dark, curly head, and said,

"Nellie, my darling little Nellie!"

"Norsir, Marse Dan," said Mammy, shaking her head, "I'd ruther she wouldn' be named Nellie. I jes don' want nobody but her ma ter be named Nellie."

"Yes, Mammy Dilsey, I, too, prefer to have that name remain sacred to our little Nellie. But, what is this baby's name?"

"She aint got no name, an' you kin name her. But, Marse Dan, you looks mighty tired. Give me de baby, an' you come on in de house, an' lay down. I see de windows is up, an' de air ablowin' thoo."

## CHAPTER V

## "JEFF DAVIS" TO THE RESCUE

AT the outbreak of the Civil War, Dan Harrison had left college a few months previous to graduation, and volunteered for service in his father's command. At the first Battle of Manassas the father was killed, and his dead body borne from the battle-field in the arms of his son. For four years the young man had suffered all the vicissitudes of war. One year before its close he was wounded and captured by the enemy, all communication with home being thereby cut off.

For six months after hostilities were over he was unable to travel, and lay helpless in a Virginia hospital. Thus it was in the late fall of 1865, when, by vent of supernatural effort, and the assistance of his old servant, Uncle Jess, he reached home, and found the little town in ashes and the inhabitants gone.

A more dismal picture never greeted human eyes. As he staggered into his desolate home, left standing by some strange providence, and fell across a bed, he had no thought or desire to ever leave it alive.

However, the next day he was able to make his way to the front veranda, and here Mammy Dilsey found him.

Fortunately for him and the other two members of his household, the Lester family, consisting of a widow and her aged father, returned to their home during the winter, bringing with them a cow, that proved a blessing, if not the salvation, of the two families.

At the approach of spring their spirits began to revive. One day, during the latter part of March, Harrison was sitting in his study, absorbed in his law books, when Mammy Dilsey appeared in the doorway, and asked,

"Marse Dan, is Jeff Davis any 'count—Jeff Davis, yo' ol' horse what you rid home f'om de war?"

"Yes, Mammy, if he had something to eat, he'd be a splendid animal."

"Well, I's been alookin' an' ahopin' all winter dat he'd die an' git out o' de way, but since he's pulled thoo dis long, I b'lieve I'll feed him up, an' see what I kin do wid him."

With a faint smile Harrison inquired,

"What do you think you'll feed him up on?"

"'Tater peelin's in de dish water 'til I kin git downt de plantation. I's been awantin' ter go see 'bout dem niggers ever since de war's been over. If dey's any 'count, dey's hid out 'nough seed f'om de Yankees ter plant a crap wid, which I's agwine ter see 'bout."

The following week Harrison was told that he would find enough "vit'ls" cooked to last him three days, the designated "vit'ls" proving to be a dish of stewed apples and a few baked sweet potatoes.

"Mammy Dilsey, don't you know that turnout will break down before you get half-way there?"

Harrison had lifted his eyes from a large legal book, and was looking out of the window.

"It may, Marse Dan, but, if you don' try ter do things, you aint never gwine ter do 'em. An' I's 'bleeged ter have some seed ter plant our garden an' patches. Me an' Ray'll stay ternight at Marse Jack Bush's. Goodbye, Marse Dan. Tak good care o' yo'se'f 'til I gits back f'om de farm."

Because too weak to protest he allowed the negress to

go off on a fool's errand. She had borrowed an old wagon to which she had hitched the horse whose harness she had made of a discarded carpet. She had been lucky enough to find a pretty good bridle. To this she had attached some scraggy, worn ropes for reins.

"Bye-bye, Daddy," lisped the year-old babe, whom Mammy Dilsey had named Ray—"de one ray o' light an' de one ray o' hope," according to what she had told Harrison when he had declared that his life was dark and hopeless.

As the old rattletrap moved off for its thirty-mile destination the baby continued to wave back at Harrison.

At the expiration of three days, strange to relate, the rattletrap returned, but without much rattle. In fact, the wagon was so heavily loaded that it could not rattle.

From the variety of animal life it contained it looked like a veritable Noah's ark. A calf and three pigs were together in one box, while in another of equal size were a pair of turkeys, five ducks, and eight hens. When these were taken out sack after sack of grain was removed—enough wheat and corn to bread the family for several months, besides furnishing seed for another crop. In addition to all this a young cow followed her calf. And last, but not least, two ragged negro children, a boy and girl, respectively bearing the names of Pete and Lena, brought up the rear. Both of them were orphans, and had been running about the Harrison plantation for some time like wild animals. Mammy Dilsey had captured them, and reduced them again to slavery. They at once became a part of Dan Harrison's home, and in time proved worthy of their salt.

By her trip to the plantation Mammy Dilsey had solved the problem of life—at least, of living, and thus brought order out of chaos. Pete under her direction was soon

"plowin' de patches," from which in due season a bountiful harvest was reaped.

So, with a well-filled larder, which furnished lubrication for the household machinery, the home was re-established, and Harrison thereby enabled to give his entire time to the study of law, which he had taken up as a profession.

## CHAPTER VI

## HER NAME IS RAY HARRISON

ONE day when Ray was two years old, Harrison lifted her into his arm, walked across his yard, and passed through a side gate to the Lester home.

"Well, Dan, I know something unusual has happened to bring you over here," said Mrs. Lester, advancing, and taking the baby.

She was a small young woman of refined appearance, and dressed in the symbols of her widowhood.

When they were seated in the livingroom, he replied,

"Yes, Miss Helen, something a little unusual has happened. I've been to the courthouse and won my first case. However, I'm not here to tell you that, but to inform you that Ray is my adopted child, and that her name is Ray Harrison. And, Miss Helen, it may be a weakness on my part, but I want that baby to grow up with the belief that I'm her real father. To make this possible, the rest of the world, our world, must also believe it."

"Dan, there is always danger in a deception like that," she protested.

Harrison looked confidently into the saddened eyes of the little widow, and replied,

"Yes, I know, but in this case I feel that the end justifies the means. She is all life has left to me, and I must gratify this whim. Nobody in Palmlee, except members of our fami-

lies, knows anything to the contrary. Mammy does not approve, but she admits there is no one hurt by the plan, and will do what I wish in the matter."

Mrs. Lester smiled sympathetically, and agreed to do her part.

"Thank you, Miss Helen," continued Harrison, "I thought you would gratify me in this weakness. Henceforth Ray is my child, and I'm to be known as her father."

Mrs. Lester followed Harrison and the child to the door. As he turned to go she admonished cheerfully,

"Dan, I saw your light at twelve o'clock last night. Be careful! You are not strong enough to study all day and half the night. Take time, my friend."

With a smile and backward look he returned,

"You should have been asleep at twelve o'clock last night. Good-bye, Miss Helen."

Just thirteen months later, after having won a noted case for his client, Harrison slipped from the courthouse to dodge congratulations, and ran in through the back doorway of Dr. Long's office. With a feeling of exhaustion he dropped to a sofa.

"Dan Harrison," began Dr. Long, earnestly, "since you ignore my advice as a physician, I appeal to you as a friend. Stop, and take life easier. You give yourself no rest or recreation. You have pored over those law books until you are now called 'The Walking Lexicon of Legal Knowledge.' In three years you have scaled the mountain heights of fame, without even touching the foothills. So, what more does your heart crave? What more does your ambition demand?"

Harrison looked up wearily at his physician, and replied,

"Thank you, Dr. Long, I appreciate your advice, both as physician and friend. But, you know, 'what I do must be

done quickly.' I haven't forgotten that you told me the Yankee bullet that shattered my arm, leaving me an empty coat sleeve, is still hidden away in my body, dangerously near my heart."

"You are mistaken, Dan. I never said the bullet was near your heart, but your lung, the right lung. And once more I urge you to have it removed."

"And once more I must decline. I cannot take any chances on my life—not yet. There is too much at stake. I cannot . . . I dare not die now! And you admit there is danger in the operation—great danger. . . ."

He was looking appealingly into the eyes of the tall, slim, almost grim dignitary.

"Yes, but 'better face a danger than be ever in fear.' And without the operation it is only a matter of time—maybe a short time—before trouble comes."

The doctor was struggling to be patient, as well as argumentative.

"But, Dr. Long," persisted Harrison, "you know that my child is unprovided for, and I must have a few years. I had rather die a dozen deaths than leave her in her present condition. My large plantation is practically worthless, and as to 'her mother's estate' that has been sold for taxes. Plantations without fences and stock are useless. So far I've managed to pay taxes, and to feed the old slaves who still linger about the place." Harrison arose from the sofa. "Well, I must be going. My baby's waiting for me."

"Dan, you are making an idol of that child."

Dr. Long went to the door with his guest.

"Good-bye, Doctor." And out walked the frail, delicate lawyer, whose gigantic intellect and Herculean strength of will had accomplished the well-nigh impossible.

## HER NAME IS RAY HARRISON

He had come from the war a financial wreck. But from the ashes of ruin he had built a new structure before many of the South could remove the débris for a foundation.

## CHAPTER VII

## MAMMY DILSEY ADMINISTERS MULLIN TEA

AS Dan Harrison left the doctor's office, and walked down the street toward his home, he noticed with unusual interest the rapid growth of the town.

Two large cotton mills and several smaller manufacturing plants had been erected. Both business and residential sections were rapidly filling up with handsome brick structures, and the little village of Palmlee was gone forever, while from its ashes was springing a truly up-to-date city.

"Marse Dan," said Mammy Dilsey, as he passed into the hallway of his home, "Miss Carrie Waters and Miss Minnie Buff is been here abeggin' me ter git you ter come ter de party ternight."

"Where is Ray?" he asked, looking from one door to the other, and finally sinking into a large arm-chair.

"Dey tuk her wid 'em, an' said you gotter come a'ter her."

"I guess they won't keep her long," said Harrison, looking out of the window.

"Marse Dan, I wish you'd go ter de party, not 'cause dem gals is arunnin' a'ter you, but 'cause you looks tired, an' I jes wants ter see you go 'bout lak you did afore de war."

"Such things do not interest me any more, Mammy Dilsey. In fact, I'd feel decidedly out of place in a ballroom now."

"You aint but twenty-six years ol'," persisted the darkie.

"Yes, I know. But my empty coat sleeve and . . . other things have changed the world for me. Tell Lena to go and bring Ray."

"I'm here, Dad." And the next instant a graceful little figure was at his side. By the aid of one foot on the rung of his chair, she sprang into his lap, and nestled against his breast.

After a long embrace he lifted her head, and looked into her face. Then, pressing his lips to hers, he again drew her to his breast. And, if the designing young ladies of the town could have seen the adoration in his expression, they would have realized that the heart of Dan Harrison had no room for them, and that the dainty bit of femininity on his lap would reign there supreme for some time.

Never had God fashioned a human being more perfectly calculated for worship than Ray Harrison at three years of age. Her eyes were chestnut brown, matched by hair of the same rich shade, which waved around her face, and fell in loose curls about her shoulders. But, instead of the brunette complexion, she had a skin so fair and delicate, that the blue veins could be traced through its transparency. She was small for her age, but well-formed, and moved around with the graceful lightness of a bird. Her clothes were as perfect as her person. Each garment was a work of art, chosen and made by the next-door-neighbor, Mrs. Lester, known to Ray as "Aunt Helen."

Through these days of reconstruction Harrison indulged himself in but one luxury—the luxury of seeing the child not only well, but elegantly dressed. Mrs. Lester had been the girlhood friend of Ray's mother, and did quite as much

as Mammy Dilsey and Harrison to gratify every wish of the little one. So, of course, the inevitable result was "a spoilt child." When one corrected the other protested.

One day Ray demanded a cut-glass dish in which to make mud pies, and because it was not given her she flew into a tantrum, which had the desired effect of causing the coveted article to be straightway forthcoming. Then it was that Harrison said,

"Mammy Dilsey, you are ruining that child."

"Yes, Marse Dan, I reckin I is, but den I can' see as how she is any worse'n other chillun," had been returned.

On another occasion Ray came running in from the fowl-yard, all flushed with her activity. On seeing Mammy Dilsey, where she expected to find Harrison alone, she stopped suddenly in the doorway.

"Now, is you been aketchin' dem little turkeys?" asked Mammy Dilsey, pointing a menacing finger at the child.

"No!" was the unhesitating answer.

"You better not, 'cause a young turkey don' want no better excuse ter die dan ter be turned on his back. An' he'll lay dar, an' kick 'til de breaf leaves him."

Ray's eyes followed the retreating figure of Mammy Dilsey until it had entirely vanished. Then, slipping to Harrison's side, and forming a plasm with her small, dimpled hands, she looked into his face with sparkling eyes, and whispered,

"Dad, there is something out yonder jus' as soft."

One day during the following week Ray was playing at Harrison's feet, when she heard Mammy Dilsey approaching with a peculiar step, that the child had learned to dread.

Then Mammy Dilsey appeared, and announced,

"Marse Dan, dar's gotter be som'pin done wid dat chil',

fer I aint agwine ter tol'rate her doin's no longer. Jes looker here. She's done kilt two chickens, two ducks an' one turkey. An' I says, what's de use o' hatchin' out fowls fer her ter kill up lak dis?"

Ray, having slipped to Harrison's protecting side, said,

"I didn't kill them. I . . ."

"You did kill 'em! You kilt 'em, an' had 'em alayin' side by side on de sofa-pillow, with dis silk han'kchief spread over 'em."

Through sobs the child explained,

"I did not kill them. I jus' hugged them to sleep, an' put them to bed."

Drawing the convulsed little body to his breast, Harrison asked,

"What are you going to do about it, Mammy Dilsey?"

With all bitterness gone from her face, and with her voice softening with each syllable, the old favorite replied,

"If dem fowls had one grain o' sense, dey would git out o' her way. But, 'stid o' dat, dey runs ter her, an' lets her pick 'em up lak she was dey ma!"

"But, Mammy Dilsey, why don't you keep the gate fastened, so she can't get into the fowl-yard?"

"Marse Dan, you sho don't know dat chil'. Gates don' have no mo' pow'r ter turn her dan if she was a sperit. Now, if dat ol' gander would come a'ter her lak he do Pete an' Lena . . ."

"Oh, Mammy Dilsey, you mustn't frighten her!"

"No, Marse Dan, I aint got no notion o' skeerin' her, but, if dat ol' gander what she calls Rob Roy was ter tak it in his head ter come a sh-u-uin' a'ter her, we'd have mo' chickens ter fry an' mo' turkeys ter bake. Hey, Pete, tak dese dead fowls an' bury dem in de peanut patch 'long wid

dem dat she squeezed ter death yestiddy. Quit cryin', Ray. Mammy Dilsey 'll fergive you dis time. Now come on, honey, an' git a piece o' cake Mammy's been asavin' fer you."

Dr. Long's assertion that Harrison gave himself no rest or recreation was proving but partly true, for a portion of each day he abandoned himself to the companionship of his child. And as time wore on she became the very elixir of his being. If depressed, her prattle restored his spirits. If nervous, her caresses soothed him to rest.

One night when she was four years old she had fallen asleep in his arm. As Mammy Dilsey took her to bear her off to bed, the child aroused enough to throw her arms about his neck, and to press her lips to his, murmuring, "Good-night, Dad." This became her custom, and, if it were ever overlooked or forgotten, at sometime during the night she was sure to wake, and cry to "tell my Daddy good-night."

Soon after Mammy Dilsey had carried the little one to bed, she returned to the library and said,

"Marse Dan, here's some mullin tea I made you, an' I wants you ter drink it. You aint alookin' well, an' I heard you acaughin' las' night."

"Oh, Mammy Dilsey, there is nothing the matter with me," replied Harrison, waving the cup away.

"Now, Marse Dan, I's been aknowin' you since you was a little boy, an' I knows when you's well an' when you aint. I aint a been seein' dem black circles under yo' eyes fer nothin'. An' didn' I see yo' ma start jes dataway?"

"You don't mean . . .?"

"Yes, I do, Marse Dan. So you tak dis tea, an' drink it."

Without another word he took the cup, and drained it. As he did so his hand trembled.

That night he was restless, and slept but little. Several

times the cold sweat burst out on his forehead, and horrified him with its chill clamminess.

"Am I fighting a losing game?" he asked himself, burying his face in the pillow.

The next day he had another talk with Dr. Long.

"Yes, Dan, it would be madness to postpone the operation longer. No, oh, no! I would not dare attempt it myself. In fact, I would not be willing to recommend anyone but Dr. Warren, of New York. He is the greatest surgeon in America."

Dr. Long was indeed a friend to Harrison. Two months later he went to Charleston to meet the young lawyer on his return from New York. As they shook hands Harrison said,

"No, Dr. Long, the bullet could not be removed without too great a risk, and Dr. Warren refused to operate. However, he took the greatest interest in my case, and promised to advise you as to the newest methods of treatment. He expects to take a business trip to Florida this coming fall, and will stop over to see me. He is one of the finest men I ever met, and was as sympathetic as an old friend. I was entertained in his home, and shown many kindnesses by his mother, as well as himself. . . . No, he held out no hope for a cure, but thought the ravishes of the disease might be checked by the outdoor life which I must lead. . . . Yes, my office work must be abandoned, and my clients will have to see me on my veranda. Have you seen Ray in the last day or two?"

"Yes, I saw her just before I left home this morning. She is all right, and looking for you tonight." They were leaving the steamer for the railroad station.

During the days that followed, Dr. Warren's instructions

were diligently adhered to, and all could see that Harrison was making a desperate struggle for his life. A sleeping porch was built, and an attractive horse and buggy were purchased. Part of every day he spent out in a large pine thicket, about three miles from town. It was here that he did much of his reading and writing. And at the end of the summer he had gained in flesh and strength.

## CHAPTER VIII

## "TURNOUTS AND B'REAVEMENTS"

IN October Dr. Warren made his promised "stop over." He arrived during the late afternoon, and found Harrison so much improved that, had he not been familiar with the deceptive methods of the disease, he, too, would have thought his diagnosis might have been wrong. But he remembered how he had seen one victim after another of tuberculosis eat heartily, hearing at the same time his sanguine plans for a long life, and in a few hours looked upon his lifeless form in a casket.

However, he could conscientiously give Harrison encouragement — the possibility of several years of life. And this was to Harrison as welcome as an oasis to a desert traveler.

This matter settled, Dr. Warren was led by his host into pleasant channels of conversation, and, ere long they were talking like old friends.

Just before night a little phaeton stopped in front of the house, and before Harrison could advance to the gate the fairy figure of Ray was lifted out, as Mrs. Lester said,

"She won the prize as I knew she would." And the little widow drove off as the child came bounding up the steps.

Taking her hand, Harrison led her to his guest, and said,

"Dr. Warren, this is my little girl, Ray."

But, instead of the expected response to his greeting, the child stood in perfect silence, looking steadfastly into Dr. Warren's face.

"I'm so sorry you're blind," she finally said, as she dropped one hand on his knee.

Another embarassing silence ensued, and then Harrison said,

"Ray, what do you mean? Dr. Warren is not blind."

With surprise she turned to Harrison, and informed him that — "Aunt Helen said he was."

"You are mistaken. Aunt Helen does not even know Dr. Warren, and could not have said such a thing," protested Harrison.

"But, Dad, I know she did. Don't you 'member when you came home from New York, and gave me the picture of Reba, his little girl, and I asked you if she was prettier than me, you said, 'Dr. Warren thinks so,' and Aunt Helen said, 'Dr. Warren is blind.' "

The two men laughed heartily, and Dr. Warren lifted Ray to his lap, studying her face with peculiar interest.

"No, little lady, I'm glad to say that I am not blind," he corrected.

"Then you can see me and my dress and shoes." She straightened out the dainty little frock, and lifted the tinsel-covered little foot.

Realizing that Dr. Warren might wonder at the gaudy costume of the child, Harrison explained,

"She has been to a fairy party, an. . . ."

"And I got the prize," interrupted Ray, lifting a crown from her head, and displaying it for their admiration. "So now," she continued, "I'm the queen."

"Supper's ready, Marse Dan," announced Pete, coming out upon the veranda. And they hurried into the house.

"Yes," said Dr. Warren, as they sat together that evening in the sitting-room, "if there is such a thing as a born doctor,

I must be one, for the science has always been as fascinating to me as the most charming romance to other people."

"But, I understand you are only twenty-five years old," interposed Harrison, incredulously.

"Yes. That is my age exactly."

"You look ten years older, and your reputation declares you twenty years older."

"Nevertheless, that is my age, but, no doubt, my whiskers contribute more than my reputation to my venerable appearance. However, a doctor's life is not adapted to the nurture of juvenility, and mine has been marked by considerable variety. My only brother was killed in battle, and my father died from blood-poisonnig toward the close of the war. Before his death I gave him my sacred promise to look after my little sister, Reba, the child of my step-mother. My father was married twice. And the care of the mother was likewise given me. The little girl has become very dear to me, but she has caused great anxiety on account of her frail constitution. So, Mr. Harrison, all these things, in addition to my heavy practice, have not been conducive to the gayety of youth. But, thank God, I'm not morose or morbid after all."

"I have always thought," said Harrison, "that the trying scenes incident to a physician's life were calculated to depress his spirits, and in some cases have a permanent impress on his life."

"My affections are very strong, and I've never become calloused to the effect of the 'taking off' of a human life. But the death that left the greatest impress on my life was not of a relative or friend, but that of a total stranger, the mystic appeal of whose dying eyes has never left me, whether I be on Broadway or in the hospital ward, or in the quietude of my

own home. Try as I will I cannot understand the psychology of their appeal."

As Dr. Warren finished his discourse there was a hush, while the two men seemed intent on unraveling the mystery of the appealing eyes of the dying stranger.

"I wont say my prayers to Lena! I wont! I wont! I hate her!" cried little Ray, dashing into the room like an outraged fury.

Placing his arm around her, Harrison turned toward the door, and in his sternest voice asked a trembling negro girl,

"What does this mean, Lena?"

"Marse Dan, she wouldn' say her prayers, an' I couldn' make her go ter bed."

"You are not supposed to make her do anything. And you will do well to remember that in future. Go! Leave Ray with me."

As he took the child into his lap, he turned to Dr. Warren, and said,

"The girl has no tact at managing her."

"A switch might be more effective than tact," was the visitor's mental verdict. A moment later, however, his heart softened as he saw the quiver of childish lips, and heard the broken baby-voice ask, "Where's Mammy?"

"She is at Mrs. Taylor's helping her nurse the little sick baby. Don't you know you told her to go, and promised not to cry? Now my little girl must go to sleep, and Mammy will come home in the morning."

In response to Harrison's assurance and gentle pressure the curly head dropped to his breast, but the brown eyes remained open. They seemed to be following her volant mind in a search for an undefined, intangible something, of which she had been suddenly aroused to a sense of need. So absorbed

was she that she scarcely moved for an hour, hearing nothing of the conversation around her. Finally a light seemed to play in the little face. Dr. Warren, sitting opposite, saw the change, and was not surprised when she sprang up, and asked,

"Where is Mama?"

"I told you she was at Mrs. Taylor's. Go back to sleep, and she sha'n't leave you anymore," said Harrison, drawing his arm reassuringly around her.

"I didn't say 'Mammy.' I said 'Mama.' I want a pretty white mama like Lucy's. Where is she dad?"

"My baby's mother is dead," he answered with emotion.

He had always known that sooner or later her motherless condition would dawn on the child, but had hoped to ward it off for some time yet. So far he had succeeded in supplying every demand of her nature. But, from the longing in her voice, more than the expressed desire, he knew that he could do so no longer. Her heart had awakened to a knowledge of her loss, and, henceforth, would call for 'Mother' as persistently as the appetite for food.

Both men were deeply affected, and yearned to comfort her, but their sympathy manifested itself in different ways. Harrison, feeling his helplessness, drew the child to him in silence. Dr. Warren manufactured story after story in an effort to draw Ray's thoughts into pleasanter channels. In time he was rewarded. Her head dropped to Harrison's breast, and her eyes closed in sleep. Her face was again bright.

Dr. Warren was intent upon studying the face of the sleeping child. Presently he said,

"Mr. Harrison, your child bears no resemblance to yourself."

Harrison became nervously evasive.

"Her hair and eyes are like mine, but . . . yes, she is like her mother," he replied in a manner that conveyed the idea that the subject was unpleasant, or, at least, undesirable.

A noise of falling pieces of wood attracted the attention of the two men, and Harrison said,

"What is it, Pete?"

The boy, who had deposited an armful of wood in a nearby box, stood with his hands in his pockets, shifting uncomfortably from one foot to the other.

"Yassir, Marse Dan, I wan' ter ax you if I kin go ter de turnout?"

A twinkle enlightened Harrison's eyes, as he replied drolly,

Oh, I suppose so, if you think you have sense enough to turn in before daylight."

At this juncture a negro girl made herself evident, and Harrison continued.

"And you, Lena, may go with Pete to the exhibition, but be sure you leave the front room in perfect condition."

"Yassir, Marse Dan," replied Lena, "I'se got de comp'ny room fixt jes as good as Mammy Dilsey herse'f could 'a'done it. . . . But, Marse Dan, I'd ruther go ter de b-reavement."

"Who's dead now?" asked Harrison.

"I don't know his name, but it's de man livin' on Marse John Dorset's place, an' dar aint no mo'ners, 'cause he aint got no fo'ks."

"Very well, you may go and be chief mourner tonight. But, be sure you are back in time to cook breakfast. Here, take Ray and put her to bed before you go."

But no sooner had she taken Ray into her arms than she awakened with a scream, and began fighting and screaming like an untamed animal.

"Give her back to me! Give her back to me!" cried Harrison.

Without reproof or remonstrance he received the child once more, and pacified her as before, saying by way of excuse.

"She seems a little nervous tonight."

But Dr. Warren looked on this indulgence with silent surprise, wondering what would become of the beautiful spoiled child. And this thought continued to intrude on his mind until late bedtime, when he was requested by Harrison to lift her from his lap, and to place her on the bed in the adjoining room.

"She is getting too heavy for my one arm," was Harrison's apology.

Fearing another outbreak Dr. Warren handled the sleeping child like a dangerous explosive. He leaned far over the bed to obviate the possibility of awaking her. Suddenly he felt her arms around his neck and her lips pressed to his own as she murmured sweetly and sleepily,

"Good-night, Dad."

Next morning Dr. Warren left for Florida without seeing Ray, but he was still wondering what would become of the pretty little specimen of human perfection. And, even after his object in Florida was accomplished and he had returned to his New York duties, he found himself strangely fascinated by memories of the night spent in the Southern home, which had proved such a revelation to him. The lack of system and method in the home was more than overbalanced by the charming manner and splendid hospitality of its head, whose brilliant conversation, interrupted by "turnouts and b'reavements" was spellbinding.

One day during the month following Dr. Warren's visit Harrison went to the kitchen, and said,

"Mammy Dilsey, I hope you'll have everything in perfect order and a nice dinner for my guests."

"Yassir, Marse Dan, I'se aputtin' de big pot in de littl' 'un. Jes looker here at dese cakes an' pies. An' come take a peep in de stove at de turkey. De President, hisse'f aint agwine ter have no finer Thanksgiving dinner dan our'n. Miss Helen is acomin' ter fix de table, an' she's gwine ter fetch some flowers fer de vases."

"Is Ray about, Mammy Dilsey?" he suddenly asked, turning to the doorway.

"I sont her over fer Miss Helen ter curl her hair, an' ter dress her up in dem new clo's, what she's been amakin' fer her."

"I seed Ray in de hog lot, aplayin' wid de pigs 'bout twenty minutes ago," announced Lena from the corner.

"I jes dis minute seed her in de stable agittin' de eggs," assured Pete, coming in with his arms full of stove wood.

"Where is the horse," asked Harrison anxiously.

"He's in de paster," responded Mammy Dilsey, "an', Marse Dan, you needn' be oneasy 'bout Ray gwine 'bout Jeff Davis, fer since de day he caught her by de dress, an' toted her 'bout over de lot she's as skeered as death o' him."

Suddenly the old negress heard a confusing noise from the rear of the house, and, with her eyes blazing in anxiety, she continued,

"But what is dat? Listen! Aint dat Ray acallin' me? Run, Lena! Run, Pete! Jeff Davis is got her agin! Git out o' my way, Marse Dan! Grab de pitch-fork, and stick it in dat horse, Lena! Git de axe, an' bust him open, Pete! Oh, Lordy-mighty, Jeff Davis is akillin' my baby!"

Mammy Dilsey's series of exclamations were interjected between excited movements here and there, waving the carving

knife, like some jungle warrior, she was following the other rescuers. Guided by the terrified shrieks of the child, they rushed to the back of the feed-house. And there, backed up in a corner, with her lap full of eggs, which she was pelting one at a time at a menacing gander, stood the cause of the anxiety.

With outstretched neck and extended wings the gander was advancing inch by inch on his prisoner. As Harrison grabbed the child Mammy Dilsey grabbed the gander. The next instant his head flew in one direction and his body in another.

As the infuriated negress decapitated the gander, she stamped her foot and remarked decisively,

"Now, sir, I guess you wont be a-Rob Royin' aroun' here no mo', ameddlin' whar you don' b'long!"

## CHAPTER IX

## MAMMY DILSEY CROSSES JORDAN

THE friendship of Dr. Warren and Dan Harrison continued, and for years knew no diminution. Letters were exchanged at regular intervals. Subsequent meetings were of almost annual occurrence.

In the year 1876 they met at the Centennial at Philadelphia. One fall day of that year, while Harrison was returning from one of his long daily drives, and recounting to Ray some of the wonders of that exposition, he, on turning a corner just before entering the town, espied Mammy Dilsey with her apron filled with herbs.

The horse was stopped, and he and Ray jumped out.

"Mammy Dilsey, why have you done this?" asked Harrison in an injured tone.

"Marse Dan I jes had ter git dis mullin 'fore de fros' fall on it. Don' you know how it ho'p you las' winter?"

"But, Mammy, you surely knew that I would have taken you in the buggy. I had far rather do without the tea and its benefits than to have you take such a walk in your feeble condition. Get in." Harrison led the faithful old servant to the buggy, assisting her with tender solicitude. Ray, now a sprightly girl of eleven years, stood in the back, holding in by twining one arm each about the necks of Harrison and Mammy Dilsey.

On reaching the town they stopped in front of the principal drug store.

"Dr. Long," called Harrison to the physician in the doorway, "will you please fix a dose of bromide for Mammy Dilsey? She has disobeyed your orders again, and, no doubt, there is another bad night in store for her."

The doctor, disregarding her protests, stepped to the buggy, and placed his finger on the black wrist. As he turned back to the door he said,

"It will take something stronger than bromide to counteract the injurious effects of that tramp."

As the glass of medicine was handed Harrison, he took it, and held it to the quivering lips, while Ray, slipping both arms caressingly around the black neck, said,

"I'm so sorry I left you this afternoon."

"Lawsy massy, honey, what you talkin' 'bout? Dar aint nothin' de matter wid yo' ol' black mammy."

But all who saw her knew better.

Mammy Dilsey had been declining for several months, and Harrison had long since prohibited all physical exertion. However, her anxiety over his cough had caused her to disregard his mandates, and to make one more effort to stay the ravages of the disease, which she knew was making terrible headway on his constitution.

And this was to be her last act of love of her long, faithful life. She never again arose from the bed to which she was that evening assisted by Harrison and Ray. She failed rapidly, and all who attended her knew that death was not far off.

On the next day she awoke from a restless sleep, and, finding Harrison alone by her bedside, asked for Ray.

The child entered with a bunch of freshly cut roses. Placing them in a vase, her eyes rested for the first time on a little cabinet Mammy Dilsey held in her hands. It was of rosewood,

and about six by eight inches in size, and of the most exquisite workmanship. Inlaid in silver on the lid was the name — NELLIE TALLIAFERRO. It was Harrison's gift to his foster-sister just before he left for the war.

Meeting her questioning eyes, Mammy Dilsey beckoned Ray, and the girl, falling on her knees by the bedside, looked from the cabinet to the beloved face of the negress, and inquired,

"Mammy Dilsey, ar'n't you feeling better today?"

"A little I guess, honey, but I wants ter tell you 'bout dis little box. It was yo' ma's, an' she tol' me ter give it ter you when you was seventeen years ol'. But, honey, Mammy Dilsey aint gwine ter be here den. So you tak it now, an' open it on de day you is seventeen, an' you'll fin' some trinkets wid yo' ma's weddin' ring."

For a week Harrison and the girl remained by her bedside, and then followed her flower-laden casket to the family burying-ground, where they saw it deposited in the spot marked by their hands.

Ray's grief was unmistakable. Her sobs were pitiable as she bemoaned her own desolation. It was her first loss of this character, and she failed to know just how to meet it.

But Harrison, by virtue of many conflicts in the arena of misfortune, was better prepared. Controlling his own emotion, he placed his arm about the child, whose eleven years of life had been so carefully guarded and shielded by Mammy Dilsey's love, and led her tenderly back to the house.

So thoroughly had Lena been trained, that the household machinery moved on as before, and Pete was proving to be, likewise, a splendid servant, thoroughly devoted to the interests of his master's home.

## CHAPTER X

## UNCLE JESS IN NEED

THAT winter Ray devoted much time to her books, and made rapid strides in learning. Harrison had been her only teacher, and, heretofore, the woods her only schoolhouse. When she was six years old her lessons had begun, but not from books. A globe was used to teach her the different countries and what relation they sustained to each other. As teacher and pupil sat together under spreading boughs, he gave epitomized accounts of the world's greatest characters, and pointed on the globe to the home of each. So, by the time the child could read, she had acquired considerable knowledge, not only of history and geography, but of other subjects as well.

In the same attractive way she was given her first lessons in ethical instruction. Harrison was never harsh, and seldom reproved her, but right and wrong, with their resultant good and evil, were kept before her by forceful allegorical stories. Thus the rich truths, so gently dropped, found lodgment in the impressionable mind of the child. The seeds were sown by a wise hand, who not only knew the soil but the proper season, and consequently they began almost instantly to germinate.

However, Ray Harrison's faults were not eradicated — far from it. In fact, her twelfth birthday found her in many respects the same "beautiful spoiled child" as of five.

It was a splendid bright spring day, this twelfth birthday

of Ray's, and she again returned from a party — this time, her own party, given by Aunt Helen. But her face was not as bright, nor her step as buoyant as on that other occasion, though face and step had lost none of their beauty and grace.

As she gave Harrison the customary kiss, and took her seat on his lap, she held out her sleeveless arm, and asked,

"Isn't it lovely?"

"The loveliest in all the world," he replied, looking at the flawless, colorful flesh.

"Oh, Dad, you know I'm not talking about my arm. Don't you see my bracelet? It is Aunt Helen's gift. Isn't it the prettiest thing you ever saw?"

"Not quite," said Harrison, still gazing at the dimpled arm, "but really, the bracelet is very beautiful, and Aunt Helen is mighty good to my little girl. Did you get no other birthday present?"

"Oodles," was the indifferent reply.

The afternoon was growing late, and Harrison's love and judgment had been waging a bitter warfare. Love had said, "It might be the last birthday present you will ever give her, and judgment had replied, "It is extravagance. Send it back!"

But finally Love had wone out.

"How is this?" he asked, pressing the spring, which released the lid of a handsome velvet case, in the silken mesh of which nestled a necklace of rare beauty. The gold chain was formed of tiny hearts, and the pendant, a heart-shaped locket, held in its lid a cross of small diamonds.

"Oh, Dad!" gasped Ray, beautifully happy.

"Pure gold," he whispered, having no reference to the necklace which she was clasping around her neck.

Tears of gladness were beginning to well up in the childish eyes.

"Come now. No more tears," commanded Harrison, gently. "Wipe them away, and decide whose picture is to go in the locket with yours. Shall it be Fred's or Paul's? And, by the way, the miniature painter, LaRue, is in town. He can do the work."

A few weeks later he observed her looking into the open locket with rapt expression, and, stepping to her side, he was confronted by likenesses of himself and Mammy Dilsey.

During the following summer Harrison's health failed rapidly, and his law practice was abandoned altogether. This misfortune followed two consecutive crop failures on the farm, which had rendered his tenants unable to pay rent, or to meet their other obligations. In addition, there had been much sickness and several deaths among the old slaves, while "Marse Dan" had continued to send when he was no longer able to go in person delicacies, doctors, and coffins at his own expense.

One day in September, as he lay on a couch by the window of the sitting-room, he heard Pete, who had just returned from the plantation, say,

"Miss Ray, Uncle Jess is tuk down wid de fever, an' dey says he's pow'ful bad off. But I heard him acallin' fer Marse Dan."

"Hush-sh-sh! Dad is not able to go, and must know nothing of this."

Ray spoke in an undertone, in an effort to keep Harrison ignorant of this troublesome news.

"Pete!" called Harrison a half-hour later.

"Yassir, Marse Dan."

"Hitch my horse to the top buggy."

"Yassir."

"But, where are you going, Dad?" asked Ray, coming in as Pete darted out.

"I'm going to see Uncle Jess, of course. Get my linen coat."

"Oh, Dad, surely you are not going to ride thirty miles in this hot weather, and you barely able to sit up. Let me go and see what can be done for him."

"No, Ray. Duty demands it. I must go."

"Please don't. It will endanger your life."

"He endangered his life many times for me."

"But, Dad, Uncle Jess is so nearly dead, you can do him no good, and why run such a risk to yourself?"

"Exactly what was said to him when I lay delirious in a filthy Virginia hospital. But he stuck by me, and saved my life. And, my dear, I will go, or try to, let the consequences be what they may. But I'm sure I'll soon be back, none the worse for the trip. You must stay with Miss Helen until my return."

As he stepped into his buggy, Ray looked through the window, and gave him a smile — one of those pitiable little smiles from a fountain of tears, and then dropped to the couch with a cry,

"What shall I do? Oh, what is to become of me?"

And this, to, though not intended for Harrison's ears, reached him as he drove off, sounding like the echo of his own thought, for "What is to become of her?" had preponderated every other question of his life. But the answer, hidden away in some nook of futurity, had ever evaded his grasp.

However, realizing that he could wait no longer for time and chance to determine a matter fraught with such danger to the child of his heart, he began to accept a proposition that had long been forming in his mind. And, by the time he

had buried Uncle Jess and returned home, it had assumed definite shape, finding expression in the following letter:

Dr. T. J. Warren,
New York, City,
Dear Friend:

I realize that the time has come when I must soon "shuffle off this mortal coil." I have had several years in which to "put my house in order," but the paramount issue is still unsettled. My little daughter will be alone in the world, and, having gained great respect and affection for yourself, and, having valued your friendship as has seldom been my privilege in life, I am going to be bold enough to ask you to take the child into your own home to be her friend and guardian.

Yours,
Dan Harrison.

## CHAPTER XI

## DR. WARREN SOLVES A PROBLEM

"HEAVENS! What could I do with that beautiful spoiled child?" exclaimed Dr. Warren as he read the letter and allowed it to slip from his fingers.

Almost instantly it was picked up again, and his gaze lingered on the written page. It was a short communication, but the eyes of the astute physician read between the lines a tale of anguish more pathetic than words could convey.

"Poor fellow! He has made a brave fight, and I feel for him. But I cannot, it is impossible! What could I do with such a child?"

His expression was a puzzled one, as he thought of his mother's home, where everything moved with the regularity of clockwork—all so foreign to the training of Harrison's petted daughter. Without further delay he answered the letter, declining the charge.

"For," wrote he, "were there no other reasons, my mother's unsettled condition would render it impossible. She is thinking of giving up housekeeping, for it looks as though my sister will never be strong enough to stand this climate. During the past three years she has been attending school in Georgia, where Mother has spent much of the time. Their preparations are made, and within a few days they will leave again for the South. If Reba's health does not improve during this scholastic year, we shall close the home here, and buy in a warmer climate. Of course, our plans are

immature, and all I can offer you is my sympathy and best wishes for yourself and little Ray."

The letter was directed and dropped into a mail box. With it Dr. Warren thought to drop the subject from his mind. But, to his surprise, he found it following him from patient to patient through the hospital wards, and thence into the busy street leading to his home.

"What could I do with that beautiful spoiled child?" he asked impatiently, failing to respond to the bows of recognition as he hurried through the congested street.

Then, as he emerged into the residential section, a soft expression stole into his face, for again he felt the dimpled arms around his neck and the baby lips against his own as they murmured, "Good-night, Dad."

"Poor little motherless girl," he whispered, and the tender light lingered in his eyes, obliterating the worldly throng through which he passed.

That night, for the first time in months, Dr. Warren attended a brilliant social function, given in honor of a Western belle. After dancing a few sets, he slipped from the ballroom, and wandered aimlessly through the flower-laden halls.

Finally, taking a seat in a secluded spot, he drifted into a deep reverie, from which he was aroused by a tap on his shoulder. Then he heard his hostess ask,

"You, too, Dr. Warren, a victim to our black-eyed siren?"

"No, Mrs. Van Derveer, I plead not guilty. Black eyes have no charm for me, though I must admit that I was for the time under the spell of a pair of blue eyes—yes, as blue as those violets at your breast. Come, this is our dance."

A few weeks later his friends learned with astonishment

that Dr. Warren's health had failed, and that he had left for Europe. Owing to his stalwart figure and magnificent bearing, people had looked upon him as being well-nigh invulnerable to disease. His trouble, however, was of a nervous nature, and gave no outward token of its insidious character.

But he, being a physician, understood its methods, and knew that the blade, though hidden, was none the less sharp, and, unless removed, would do its deadly work. Nevertheless, Dr. Warren, himself, failed to realize the full seriousness of his trouble, and thought a few weeks of rest in Paris would be all that was necessary to restore his overstrained nerves. But, after a stay of two months in the French capital, he found himself no better. Then it was he became alarmed, and decided to place himself under a specialist in Switzerland.

He threw himself with zest into the life of the tourists, living much in the open. And at the end of six months he was somewhat improved, but was told that he could not resume his practice for some time yet—possibly for years.

He was advised to spend awhile in Italy. This he did, and while there wrote his agent to sell the New York residence, and to negotiate the lease of his hospital.

By spring he was greatly improved, and in the latter part of March, after a year's absence, he returned to America.

He had no thought of resuming his work, for his condition was still precarious. In fact, he almost immediately closed a deal for a four year's lease of his hospital, and arranged to join his mother in the Georgia home she had recently bought.

It was on the eve of his departure, while sitting at his desk assorting his business papers, that he came across an

unopened letter which had followed him to Europe, and then found its way back to his New York address. With an exclamation of surprise he broke the seal, and with unsteady hand held the letter before his eyes. Then, as he refolded the sheet, and slipped it into his pocket, he rang for a servant, and hurriedly wrote out the following telegram:

Dr. T. B. Long,
Palmlee, S. C.
Is Dan Harrison still living? Reply at once.
T. J. Warren, N. Y.

"See that this gets off at once, and wait for the answer," he said to the boy as he appeared.

In just one hour he read the reply:

"Dan Harrison living, but his death momentarily expected."

Then Dr. Warren replied, this time to Harrison:

"I will accept guardianship of your daughter. Will start for South Carolina at once."

Before leaving his desk he wrote his mother that he was starting South, and would wire her from Palmlee, S. C.

## CHAPTER XII

## THE CABINET RESCUED

AT midnight forty hours later Dr. Warren was led by Pete to the room where the spirit of Dan Harrison was fluttering for freedom against its prison walls. It was with great effort that the sufferer arose from the pillow, and extended an emaciated hand, which Dr. Warren grasped, and held in silence.

The other inmates of the room passed out, leaving the two men together.

"Dr. Warren," said Harrison in a weak, but earnest voice, "how much I thank you God alone can know. For years I have tried to make arrangements for my child, but each plan would vanish like a spider's web, and back to my wilderness wanderings I would go. And, in spite of myself, you were my 'pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night.' "

Then the two friends had a long secret conference. Finally, with a pained expression in his face, Harrison dropped Dr. Warren's hand, and said,

"Bring her to me."

Dr. Warren stepped to the door, and opened it, but, seeing no one, crossed the hall to the opposite room, where he beheld a forlorn little figure, sitting on the floor with her face buried in sofa cushions.

"Come!" he said, laying his hand on her shoulder.

Ray sprang to her feet with the frightened cry,

"Is he . . . Is Dad?"

"Your father wishes to speak to you."

He placed his arm about the swaying figure, and led her to the sick-bed.

"My darling, my little Ray, it is all right now. Dr. Warren is going to take care of you, and I want you to be the same sweet daughter to him you have been. . . ."

"Yes, Dad, I'll try," she sobbed, nestling confidingly in Dr. Warren's arm, that still encircled her waist.

Within a short while Harrison was dead.

Late the next afternoon, as soon as the burial was over, Dr. Warren and Ray left the cemetery for the depot. As they stepped from the carriage Mrs. Lester advanced from the waiting-room, and said,

"Dr. Warren, I see the drayman coming with Ray's trunk. But this valise contains all that she will need during the trip."

Then, as Dr. Warren hurried away to the baggage room, she turned to Ray, and said,

"My darling, I have so longed to talk to you about your mother, but Dan thought it best not to. However, I'll tell you all someday. In the meantime, you may know that she was the sweetest little mother a babe ever had.—Sit here, dear, till I return." She hurried to the far end of the platform where Dr. Warren was checking the trunks. When he had finished she said to him,

"Before we separate I wish to tell you, in case you tire of your charge, and want to give Ray Harrison up, I'll take her. I should not have acquiesced in her surrender had I not been going away to California, where my uncle has urged me to come make my home with him."

Placing the checks and tickets in his pocket, Dr. Warren lifted his hat, and replied,

"Mrs. Lester, I have no intention of resigning my guardianship, nor shirking the responsibility I have assumed."

A train had rolled up, and Ray had started toward it when Dr. Warren and Mrs. Lester reached her side.

"Good-bye, Aunt Helen," she cried, throwing her arms about the neck of Mrs. Lester, and clinging to her until Dr. Warren interrupted,

"Come, Ray. Our train is waiting."

At the hotel that night in Savannah Dr. Warren registered, "T. J. Warren and ward—New York City." Then, while in the act of dropping the pen, he again turned to the register, and drew a line through "New York City," writing instead, "Sylva, Ga."

As he caught Ray's hand to assist her up the steps he found it hot and fluttering, and, on looking into her face, he saw the muscles twitching under the fever-parched skin. On reaching the first of the two rooms he said to the boy who threw open the door,

"Bring me a glass of hot milk quick."

Placing Ray in a large chair, he took her mother's little cabinet from her hands, and laid it on the dresser. Then, drawing a small phial from his pocket, he dropped a potion into a glass of water.

"Here," placing it to her lips, "is something to quiet you. And this," taking the milk from the boy, "is a necessity. Now go to bed. I'll be in the next room, and you can call me easily."

In a short time he heard her breathing regularly, and knew that the sedative had taken effect. But his own overstrained nerves refused to be quieted. At midnight he dressed and went down to the office, where he asked for

something to read. While making his selection from a number of books, he asked,

"What about a glass of milk? Is it possible to get such a thing at this time of night?"

"Oh, yes," answered the clerk, "but I'll have to see the chef."

"Well, just leave it alone for the present, and I'll try this poem, 'Lucille' as a soporific, and, if it fails, I'll come back for the milk. By the way," he turned suddenly, "I have not slept a wink for thirty-six hours, and when I once get to sleep will be hard to wake. So be sure I am fully aroused, and up in time for the train in the morning."

Returning to his room, Dr. Warren lighted the gas, and laid down without removing his trousers. In a little while the book slipped from his hand, and he knew nothing more until the crashing of the door as it fell from its hinges and the cry of "Fire!" fell simultaneously on his ears. The next instant he was seized by the night clerk, and jerked to his feet.

"Hurry, man! Everybody else is out! I have your valise. Come on!"

Not until they were halfway down the long hall did Dr. Warren realize what it all meant.

"Where is my ward?" he cried to the vanishing clerk.

"She is out! Everybody is out! Come on, or you are lost!"

But, without a moment's hesitation, Dr. Warren turned, and rushed back to Ray's room to find the door locked from the inside. Throwing himself against it with a force that broke the lock, the door flew open.

By the light of the burning room adjoining he saw that Ray was still in bed. Without calling her name he caught

her in his arms, with the bedclothes spread around her, and rushed from the room.

"Put me down! Put me down!" she screamed.

But, tightening his hold on her he hurried to the staircase. Then with an eel-like motion Ray slipped from his arms, and darted back like a young deer. For a moment he stood in stupefied horror.

"Ray! Ray!" he called, finally dropping the counterpane, and leaping after her.

Into the room she ran, and again miraculously appeared, carrying in her hands the cabinet.

Dr. Warren seized her arm, and reprimanded excitedly,

"How dare you take such a risk for a few gewgaws!"

He pulled her through a cloud of smoke and flame to the staircase, and out of the building.

As they emerged they were greeted by a tremendous cheer, which drew them across the broad street to a little park beyond. With the other escaped guests they stood unconscious of their scanty apparel, until they were precipitated into a noonday glare by a grand pageantry of sparks emitted by the collapsing building.

"Bring your daughter to my mother's home across the street," said a young man in a pleasant voice to Dr. Warren. Then he led the way to a handsome stone residence opposite the park.

After hasty introductions, Dr. Warren said,

"Your assistance will be greatly appreciated, for we must leave at seven for Mooreville, and it is now five. My ward's trunk is in Mooreville, and she needs some clothes until we reach there."

"If you were only a boy," said Mrs. Odell, wrapping a large shawl around Ray, "I could dress you up immedi-

ately, for I have boy clothes from babyhood up. But I never had a little girl. We'll arrange it some way, however." And she drew her to her corpulent, cordial self.

It was Paul Odell, who had invited the strangers to his mother's home.

"You need have no anxiety of getting left," he assured Dr. Warren. "Mother will have us ready. I, too, expect to leave on the same train for North Georgia."

## CHAPTER XIII

## MIRANDY WEST ACTS AS HOSTESS

WHILE still in his early twenties Paul Odell had already won a name at the bar and considerable distinction in the political world. He was looked upon as the most promising young man of his section, and the older heads predicted for him a brilliant future. He was an indefatigable worker, but possessed the rare gift of being able to turn business into pleasure and pleasure into business.

Having decided for the first time in four years to take a vacation, he had engineered his own appointment as revenue officer, and, with rod and reel and other essentials, started for Cahutta Mountains, the abode of the speckled trout and the moonshiner.

Leaving the train at Dalton, he took a hack for Spring Place, the county seat of Murray. There he spent the night. Early the next morning he started on foot in pursuit of rest and recreation.

The highway was followed until it became a byway, and then dwindled into a pig trail, gradually losing itself among the limestone rocks of the mountain side. But on and on he pressed, stimulated by the same interest that characterized him in his profession.

About noon he reached the mountain summit, and sat down to eat his lunch. On completing his meal, he realized that he needed water, and at once he arose and started in quest of it. For a full hour he found no suggestion of a

spring. His thirst became excessive, and the recollection of the clear, cold streams over which he had passed during the morning was tantalizing. So, while debating in his mind whether to go on, or to retrace his steps, he sank down in the shadow of a tremendous boulder, and rested his head against its cool, mossy bosom.

The stillness was intense. Then suddenly, he heard a far-off noise—a low-murmured call on the other side of the rock. Springing to his feet he was soon looking over a precipice, where some two hundred feet below he saw a clear, dashing, willow-rimmed stream.

With a haste that might have been called foolhardy he hurried down to its banks, and, dropping to his knees, drank like a famished animal. Then, after bathing his face and hands, he took a seat a short distance back from the bank, and looked with fascinated eyes at the clear, cold water as it went dashing down the mountain gorge.

"And this," commented he, "tallies exactly with the description."

Turning his face upstream, he gave a whoop of delight, for not more than fifty feet away he saw the clear, limpid stream alive with speckled trout. And just a little further up they were leaping and bounding for the flies that swooped down from the limbs above.

Almost instantly he was in the water, pushing against the strong current, and casting for the coveted fish. In spite of inexperience and lack of skill, he began catching them at once. But he kept going on and on, lured by the larger ones just a little further upstream.

At the expiration of three hours Paul Odell found his wallet full to overflowing, and refusing to hold another fish. He stepped from the stream, and, as the water poured from

his wet clothing, he looked with pride upon his speckled beauties. He was seized with a longing to test their superior flavor, of which he had heard so much.

"But where can I get them cooked, and where am I to spend the night?" he suddenly asked himself.

Then he remembered with consternation that he had seen no sign of habitation for hours. To return was out of the question, as night was almost upon him, and this fact was accentuated by the weird cry of the screech-owl further up the stream.

From childhood he had shrunk with superstititous awe from this uncanny little fowl, and his first impulse was to turn in the opposite direction. But, knowing that his only chance for shelter was forward, he conquered his weakness, and moved off with a quickened pace, though greatly impeded by wet clothes and heavy wallet.

Ere long the nocturnal dirge again sounded on his ears, still in his course, but apparently as far away as before. There was no time for hesitation, as darkness was rapidly approaching—a darkness from which he was actually running. He pushed on through the narrow defile, first on one side of the stream and then on the other, no longer picking his way, but plunging into the water whenever it facilitated his progress.

As he entered a dense thicket, that almost blocked his way, the mournful cry of the owl, more ghostly than ever, sounded from the opening some distance ahead, and was answered by a chorus of the same sepulchral voices all around him.

Terrorized by a sense of loss and the proximity of the innumerable little harbingers of woe, he dashed through the thicket like a madman, and emerged with a leap that landed

him on a cedar bucket in the clearing. As bucket and tin dipper went rattling down the mountainside, a meek, childish voice said,

"Hit aint no use, Mister. Yer kaint git 'im. I seen 'im go in that thar hole under the cliff."

"Saw what?" shrieked Paul, looking at a slender, delicate boy, sitting on a rock by a spring.

"The bear. He wa'n't much ahead of yer, an' he sho' was skeered. But I tell yer how we'uns can git 'im."

"I don't want to get him. But I do want some place to spend the night."

Before the child could reply, a voice from the cliff above called,

"Jamee-ee!"

Instantly the little hands flew to the boy's mouth. But, instead of the expected shrill whistle, he gave the long, weird cry of the screech-owl. And from the trees in every direction the same answering chorus was returned.

For a full minute Paul looked at the child in horrified silence, and then asked with revulsion,

"How can you?"

"Oh, hit's plum easy, but yer jest orter hear 'Tootley. She kin beat me all holler."

The boy took up the refilled bucket, and led the way to the cabin above.

"What might be your name?" timidly asked the hostess, drawing the stranger into the fire-lighted room. She was a frail little woman, dressed in a checkered homespun, which showed the wear of much washing.

"My name is Odell—Paul Odell, and I'd like to get a night's lodging here."

"To-be-sure. Come right in, Paul, an' make yourself

to-home. Sit down here, an' dry yourself, whilst me an' Jamie clean your fish. Yessir, my name is Mirandy—Mirandy West. You jest make yourself to-home, Paul, 'til I call you to supper, an' hit won't be no time, fer the fire is already in the cook-stove."

Sure enough, in almost "no time," the door was pushed open, and Paul was invited into the "lean-to," or shed-room, where a splendidly cooked supper awaited him. The table and dishes, as well as all else about the house, were coarse, but spotlessly clean, Mrs. West, herself, though uneducated, possessing an innate refinement, rare among the folk of the hills.

Her hands were small, but bore the battle-marks of labor. Her voice was soft, and of pleasant tone, making one easily forgive the grammatical errors of her speech. And, above all, she knew how to be hospitable without being intrusive, a virtue seldom found in the mountaineer.

After supper, she led the way back to the "big-room," which was in the spell of a mellow glow, made by burning pine knots, thrown into the fireplace.

"Here, Paul, you jest set right down in 'Tootley's rockin'-cheer. She made hit herself, an' hit's a good 'un. Yessir, she's gone away off to school. She got her head so sot on book-larnin', thet hit seemed she'd go plum' crazy if she didn't. I disremember the place, but her pa knows. He does the writin'. She's been gone now close on to seven mont's, but hit seems thet many years—hit's so lonesome 'thout her. Her pa, he jest dotes on 'Tootley, an' he 'lowed our loss 'ud be her gain, an', to-be-sure, it will. But hit's hard on me an' Jamie, an' if it wa'n't for Brother Andrew, we couldn't stand hit.

"But, when we'uns git down-hearted, he jest comes

'round, an' cheers us up. No, Paul, Brother Andrew aint the pastor of thet little meetin'-house you seen. He ain't the preacher of no special meetin'-house. He jest preaches whar there aint no preacher. But mos'ly he jest goes about doin' good, an' ahelpin' fo'ks in trouble. I calls him the 'Good Shepherd,' 'cause he looks so much like thet man up there in the picture, what's got the lam' in his arms. An' 'Tootley said, when she tacked hit up ag'in' the wall, thet hit was 'The Good Shepherd.' So, you look right good at thet Good Shepherd, an', if you ever see Brother Andrew, you'll know him.''

It was too good an opportunity for Mirandy West to pour out the pent-up expressions of her heart. She was rocking nervously in her crude chair. It had ''walked'' almost into the fire. Mirandy placed it back, and continued,

''But you won't see him, 'cause he don' go nowhar 'cept whar fok's is in trouble. The fust time we 'uns seen him was about two years agone. One day 'Tootley was out there in the woods acryin' her eyes a'most out, 'cause she didn' have no book larnin'. An' up come Brother Andrew, an' larnt her trouble, an' the next day he brought some books. Then, in a little while, 'Tootley was areadin' an' awritin'. Then her pa 'lowed she was so smart she oughter have a chance. So one day las' fall he come in with a quar look on his face, an' said, ''Tootley's got to have a chance!'

''An' so Joe, thet's her pa, sol' the young mule an' two heifers, an' got enough money to start her off on, but hit wouldn' keep her goin'. So he looked sorter desperate-like, an' then went to work in the saw-mill. But thet's too fur away fer him to come home at night. But, when he does come, me an' Jamie talks cheerful-like, an' don't let him know how we miss him an' 'Tootley, 'cause he looks so

downhearted anyhow. Now, if hit wa'n't fer his cripple' foot, her pa could make the money fer her schoolin' in little or no time."

As Mrs. West unconsciously revealed her lonely, self-sacrificing life, Paul looked upon her with reverence, and realized that, unlearned though she was, she possessed the virtues that had ever enshrined wifehood and motherhood in the hearts of men.

That night, after he had gone to bed, his thoughts centered on the absent daughter on whom "her pa doted," and wondered what effect the education she was getting at such a cost to others would leave on her own life. Would it spoil her, or make of her the woman her mother might have been?

Next morning Paul stood looking down at the turbulent water below.

"What is the name of that creek?" he asked Mrs. West.

"Noontootley," she answered, "an' thet puts me in min' of when my little girl was a baby. One day I was down there awashin', when up rode a man—one of them low-down, meddlin' revenue officers—an' asked jest like you done, 'What's the name of this creek?' I said, 'Noontootley,' an' my baby, who was asettin' on the sheepskin by me, looked up an' said jest as plain as you could 'a' said hit, ''Tootley.' An' from thet time on we'uns—thet is, the home-fo'ks—have abeen callin' her 'Tootley. Oh, no, hit aint her sure enough name, but hit 'peared to suit, an' . . ."

"Say, Mister, say, Paul, don't yer want ter kill a squir'l?" interrupted Jamie, pointing to a shaking branch overhead.

"You bet I do. But I have no gun." Paul began to manifest great interest in his surroundings.

"Thar's a gun on the rack, an' shells in the cub'ard," said Mrs. West.

Within a moment's time the squirrel lay at their feet. With the delight of a schoolboy Paul seized his trophy, and held it up for admiration.

"Thar's another'n on t'other limb," reminded Jamie indifferently.

With the second squirrel in his hand, and his face beaming with pleasure, Paul turned to Mrs. West, and inquired,

"Will you board me for a few days?"

"To-be-sure. You're plum welcome to stay as long as you want to, but we don' never charge nobody."

"Then, thank you so much! And I'll also accept the loan of the gun and shells. I left mine over at Spring Place. And I believe I'll have to draw still further on your generosity, for today at least. I want Jamie for my guide. Since my experience of yesterday, I'm afraid I might get lost again."

"To-be-sure, Jamie's agoin' with you." She laid a caressing hand on the head of the boy.

For the next four days that ill-matched pair, the cultured city gentleman and the ignorant mountain boy, were constant companions. Early each morning they left the clean cabin of Mirandy West, and returned at night hungry for the fish and game they brought.

## CHAPTER XIV

## THE MOONSHINER

ON the evening of the fourth day Paul asked Mrs. West, "How often do you or Jamie go to Spring Place?"

" 'Bout onct a week, an' oftener when the hens is a layin' good."

"I ask because I take my last hunt in the morning, and, if I get on track of those turkeys Jamie has been telling me about, I may be led in that direction, and I should like to get your consent to take the gun, and leave it at the hotel there."

Mrs. West assented heartily.

"Thank you, but you must not think of getting breakfast, Mrs. West, for I shall leave long before daylight."

"What!" protested his hostess, "Walk twenty mile when our nag is astandin' up, eatin' her head off? No, sirree! You jest come on back, an' eat your breakfast, an' you and Jamie kin ride Filly. She's used to totin' double."

He had seen from the first, that to offer money would be to have it returned, so he had planned to provide a liberal donation to leave with the gun at the hotel, and to be gotten after his departure.

That night Paul Odell went to bed with a fluttering heart over the anticipated hunt of the morrow. However, it was not a turkey, but a man he expected to capture. During the day he had discovered unmistakable signs of a wildcat still, and to take the culprit red-handed he felt would be quite a feather in his cap and the proper ending of his week's sport.

With confidence in self and disregard of danger, he crept out of bed, and left the house soon after midnight, starting on his perilous quest, without a thought of the men who had gone out on similar errands, and never lived to tell the tale.

But, guided by that same lucky star that fortune had ever held over him, he found the still. In that dark hour, just before the dawning, he slipped close enough to hear the loud breathing, and to see the dim outlines of its one operator, as he lay wrapped in a coarse blanket on the ground.

He leveled his gun, and was in the act of saying, "Surrender in the name of the law!" when his keen eyes, accustomed to the darkness, saw a long, double-barrel shot-gun by the sleeper's side.

In another moment it was in Paul's hands, divested of shells, and as helpless as its owner. He then, still alert, eased himself down on a log to await the coming of day and the awakening of his prisoner, from whose face he never removed his eyes.

"Well, stranger, what-yergoin' ter do 'bout hit?"

Paul sprang to his feet, and leveled the gun, but he was so taken by surprise that he said nothing, and could scarcely believe that the voice emanated from the motionless lips, till they again said,

"What-yer goin' ter do 'bout hit?"

"Do about it? I'm going to march you over to Spring Place, and ship you to Atlanta. That's what I'm going to do about it. I advise you to make no trouble, or it will be all the worse for you."

"I aint got no idee of makin' no trouble, stranger, fer I know hit's all up with me." He rose to a sitting posture. But, when the leveled gun was lowered, and the officer took no action, the prisoner said,

"I aint aspectin' no sympathee, nor awantin' no pitee. So do your worst!"

But Paul was so lost in admiration, that he scarcely heard what was said, for there before him, in the body of the moonshiner, were a face and figure indicating the physical and intellectual giant. It was a fine head on fine shoulders. From under a broad, massive brow deep-set black eyes looked at the captor with the cold, fearless gaze of an eagle. And the thin lips were trembling as he said again,

"No, siree! I ain't awantin' no sympathee!"

To the young lawyer, who had made a study of human faces, that flawless piece of God's workmanship appealed tremendously.

"By what strange miscarriage of the divine plan," thought he, "is this man a lawbreaker, instead of a lawmaker?"

As he looked at the splendid physique and strong face in its dark perfection, he thought of Israel's leader, the world's first and greatest lawmaker.

"Oh," he mused, "what a sight it would be to see that cold, phlegmatic countenance lighted up by some deep, soul-stirring passion, such, for instance, as Moses felt when he forgot himself, and thrust the God-given Commandments to the earth, breaking the stone on which they were inscribed. But—no—he is incapable of emotion. The divine spark—the soul—seems to be lacking. He is nothing more than a magnificent animal."

The mountaineer, growing nervous under Paul's changing expression, said for the third time,

"I aint awantin' no sympathee, nor aspectin' no pitee."

Paul was irritated by this persistent remark.

"Have you no pity? Is there no one to suffer for your

crime? Is there no home to be made desolate by your absence? Is there no wife, or child to look in vain for your coming?"

The mountaineer grew rigid, threw his long arms outward, and his clenched fists drove the nails into his flesh. For a moment he sat thus, and then the out-stretched arms slowly fell. The flesh began to quiver, and the strong body to sway. The expressionless face of a moment ago was now aflame with the all-consuming fire, that destroys the contents, and leaves the structure in ruins.

"Mirandy! Jamie! 'Tootley! Ah, God! my little 'Tootley!" he cried fervently.

The misery depicted in face and voice was terrible. But Paul, having leapt to his feet, was spellbound, and unable to apply the names heard in the sudden outcry.

Again the despairing voice of the outlaw cried,

"Mirandy! Jamie! 'Tootley!"

Instantly Paul Odell was on his knees, with his arms around the swaying form, as it dropped limp to the ground He understood now that this was Joe West, the husband of the woman and the father of the boy, the fruits of whose kindness he had so recently been the recipient.

"What does this mean?" He was fairly terrorized. Then laying his ear to the whispering lips, he caught,

" 'Tootley! My little gal, 'Tootley!"

And these were Joe West's last words. He was dead.

After the first few moments, Paul pulled himself together, and tried to view the situation in the light of reason. But his countenance was full of pathetic appeal.

"This," said he, "is the termination of my week's pleasure, the consummation of my anticipated triumph, the reward of my contemplated victory. The animal that I looked upon as a kind of beast has turned out to be a man with a

[illegible] whiskey?
[illegible] out
[illegible] his

## CHAPTER XV

## "WELCOME HOME!"

IT would not be difficult to describe Sylva, for many accurate and picturesque descriptions have been written of such typical Georgia towns, where the two tracks of a busy, everyday railroad ply their way through the heart of the place, giving a contrasting smudge to the otherwise beautiful locality. Near the yellow box-like depot, sufficiently commonplace in its appearance, ran a narrow street, hardly more than a country road, and perpendicular to the railroad, on which were evident a few dingy wooden structures, displaying signs of "General Merchandise," and holding open to the public a ready and lasting welcome.

The few stores, with an occasional warehouse, were nearest the depot, while further out on the same street were some really handsome homes, most of them newly built. The greenery of the well-kept lawns and the matchless oaks gave to the place an indescribable freshness. The air was almost heavy with the odor of bursting blooms, and everywhere there was a strange lull and quiet. The sun beat on the depot and railroad tracks with intensified heat, but under the shade of the oaks and other shaded places there was a cool breeze sweeping back and forth, wafting the sweet perfume of the flowers hither and anon.

It was afternoon and train time. A few darkies lingered about the depot, curious, as ever, to see what was going on, and a dog frolicked and barked at a ragged little negro, who was

wallowing in the hot sand. A whistle blew, and in a moment the heavy, black thing rolled hurriedly into view.

A tall, slim girl, of about fourteen years of age, stepped out of the waitingroom, and peered anxiously toward the approaching train. It was Reba Warren, and she was expecting her brother and his ward.

The train rolled up, and stopped. Dr. Warren and Ray stepped out, and a cordial embracing took place.

Following the introduction, the two girls looked at each other in uncertainty for a moment, and then, as if impelled by one impulse, a healthy hug was given each to each.

"How long have you been here?" inquired Dr. Warren of his sister.

"I came last night, but Mother has been here a month."

They were walking down the street of the stores and houses, when Dr. Warren said,

"Look here, Reba, I thought Sylva was only a small village, but, if all the streets are as long as this one, it must be quite a city."

"But all are not so long," said Reba, laughing, "In fact, the whole town is on this street, except the little triangle of business houses across the railroad."

"And, no doubt, these beautiful trees are the cause of the town's growth in this direction, for it is easy to see that they are much older than the houses."

"Yes, Sylva is a new town of only a few years growth. It was born after the railroad came, so Mrs. Bryant told me this morning."

Her brother was all interest, but his ward walked in pensive silence, absorbed in her own thoughts. However, both were oblivious to the fact that they had left the town, and that the street had become a country road. There was a sud-

den turning to the right, and there, without warning, they stood before The Jessamines.

"Welcome home!" cried Reba, springing forward, and throwing open the iron gates.

But, instead of entering, her two companions stood spellbound. Dr. Warren turned pale, and lifted his hand, as if to shut out some horrible picture. With a like involuntary movement Ray lifted her hands, and threw back her head. Her face became suffused in a pink glow, and every feature vivified with rapture. Her hands were clasped, as if in prayer, and her lips whispered, "The paradise of dreams." Then her whole being, with one deep, long draught, drank in the cape jessamine perfume.

Dr. Warren's surprise was as great as Ray's delight. Up to this time he had not received the slightest intimation that the home his mother had bought was The Jessamines. And he had supposed that the route he had taken from Mooreville bore him far to the left of the one traversed by Sherman's army in the sixties. During the intervening years the immediate surroundings had undergone such a change, that scarcely a trace of resemblance remained.

But on this spring afternoon he found The Jessamines itself, looking identically the same as when he had seen it in 1865. For thirteen years it had given of its bounty to friend and foe alike. For thirteen years its flowers had bloomed, and shed their fragrance on the just and the unjust. Now, after thirteen years, Dr. Warren had returned to find it arrayed in its pristine beauty, with nothing to suggest the vicissitudes through which it had passed.

It had emerged from the war unscathed, only to fall a prey to the carpet-bagger, whose unhallowed hands had tossed it like a bagatel from one fraudulent purchaser to another.

Then the trying period of reconstruction had been followed by the advent of the railroad, which ushered in a regime of speculation as menacing to The Jessamines as the carpet-bagger. But, by some good fortune, none of the desecrating finger-marks were now visible, and the beautiful old home stood calm and serene in its erstwhile pride, ignoring the new town, with its "squatter sovereignty" and the "iron horse" as it went shrieking through its broad acres.

"Welcome home! Welcome to The Jessamines!" cried Reba from the inside of the gates, and the spell was broken.

Dr. Warren stepped forward, and passed up the walk. Ray slowly advanced to Reba's side, and then stopped to lay her hand caressingly on one of the white blossoms, as it leaned invitingly near.

"Break it. Break all you want," said Reba, enthusiastically, at the same time filling her own hands with the flowers, and then passing them to her companion.

"They are so lovely, and the whole place is so beautiful," Ray responded, "The cape jessamine has always been my favorite flower."

That evening, after an early supper, the girls retired to their room, and, as the door closed behind them, Dr. Warren arose, and walked a couple of times across the floor of the library, and then resumed his seat in front of Mrs. Warren.

"Mother," he began, "my friend, Dan Harrison, was buried yesterday, and his daughter was left without a relative. I have assumed the care of her. In other words, I have become her guardian."

At this hesitating statement Mrs. Warren stiffened up, and asked,

"What do you propose to do with her?"

"I should like to take her into our home, and for a few

years, until her education is completed, to do with her just as with Reba."

With an icy voice Mrs. Warren asked,

"Dr. Warren, do you think you have the right to foist this girl on my hands, to bring this foreign element into my home, without my knowledge or consent? I do not know what you may think, but I think you have presumed entirely too far."

Had she dashed a bucket of cold water into his face the change could not have been more instantaneous or complete. Instead of the suppliant, Mrs. Warren was confronted by the dictator. For a full minute his annihilating gaze centered on her face. Then, in the softest voice, he said,

"Yes, I see I've presumed too far in the confidence I placed in you. As to my right, let's see about that. For years I've worked for others, and the fruits of my labor have been lavished on others. For years the energies of my young manhood have been spent in providing and maintaining a home for others. Hence, I have none for myself. I never sought the care of this orphan girl. On the contrary I shrank from it. When I found myself in this unavoidable position, my thoughts turned to you — not merely because I had a right, but because I trusted your goodness of heart and mother-instinct to plead for the child that Fate had thrust on the world, instead of your own. But, I'll take Ray Harrison, and leave your. . . . ."

Mrs. Warren was quick to respond,

"Dr. Warren you dare not break your word to your father, and abandon his child for a stranger?"

She was turning slightly pale, knowing very well that Dr. Warren had a will of his own.

"No. I have no more thought of breaking my word in regard to Reba than I have in regard to Ray. But Reba has

a home with all of its comforts, and Ray shall have one if I live long enough to find it."

"But you cannot afford the expense of two homes. Dr. Warren, I'm sorry I said what I did. Do not take me too seriously. I'll assume the care of — of———"

"Ray Harrison is her name."

Realizing that she had said too much, and in one unguarded moment had revealed her true character, Mrs. Warren was now doing some good acting to regain her lost ground, and she played the role of penitence so effectively, that her step-son again became her dupe.

"Very well, Mother. I'm glad your better nature has asserted itself. But, before I take advantage of your offer, I must tell you that Ray is terribly spoiled. She has been petted and humored all her life. She knows no law but her own will. She has had negroes at her beck and call, and I don't suppose she knows the first rule of systematic housekeeping."

"The poor child must not be condemned without a trial. Just leave her to me, and she'll be all right."

"Thank you, Mother. You don't know what a burden you have lifted."

He smiled in a great youthful manner.

Reba appeared in the doorway, and said,

"Brother, Ray is crying, and I believe her head is aching."

"Yes," replied Dr. Warren quietly, "poor little Ray is suffering, but I fear we are powerless to help her. Hers is a pain that nothing but time can heal. Her father died two days ago, and she has no friends but ourselves."

"I'll go see what can be done for her," interposed Mrs. Warren.

Her step-son followed a short distance behind, and, as he reached the doorway of the room in which Ray was resting, he saw Mrs. Warren lean over and kiss the cheek of the sobbing girl — a kiss designed for his eyes. An hour later he tiptoed to the doorway again, and saw two girlish heads on the same pillow, and two pairs of eyes closed in slumber.

## CHAPTER XVI

## "IN THE AGES TO COME"

EARLY next morning Dr. Warren was awakened by peals of girlish laughter, and, looking from his window, he saw the two girls among the flowers, and heard them talking with the freedom and familiarity of childhood. They looked as fresh as the flowers they gathered.

"Oh, Reba, I want that cluster of roses for my birthday present. You know, I'm thirteen today."

"And I'm fourteen today," said Reba quietly, as they advanced to the coveted flowers just under Dr. Warren's window. The strange coincident of the same birthday produced no surprise in their effervescent minds. They were just at that age when life presents so many surprises, that nothing surprises.

"I have it," cried Ray from the top of the ladder, "And here's another just as pretty for you, Reba. We must wear them, and make believe they are birthday gifts from our fairy princes."

"I wish my fairy prince would change mine into a horse and buggy," said Reba, "And what do you want him to change your roses into, Ray?"

"Nothing, thank you. They are more beautiful than anything he could make of them. But I love the cape jessamines the best."

"But sometime? — sometime in the future, what would you have him do for you?" persisted the blue-eyed Reba.

"Sometime in the future, in the ages to come, I would have him touch with his magic wand, and change my abode, whatever it maybe, into The Jessamines. And then, if his power were not exhausted, I should want him to touch some man, some *mortal* man, and turn him into a fairy prince for me."

When Dr. Warren heard his sister speak of her birthday it reminded him that he had overlooked a present. The unusual incidents of the past few days had crowded it out of his mind. Hurrying from his room to consult his mother, he met that lady on the threshold.

"Dr. Warren," she ventured hesitatingly, "did you know that this is Reba's fourteenth birthday?"

"Yes, Mother, and I hope you have a present suitable for the occasion. I'm sorry to say that for once I overlooked it entirely."

"Then, I'm so glad you have bought nothing, for now we can go in together, and give her the one thing she craves above all others, a pony and buggy."

"But, Mother, how can we get a pony and buggy at this late hour?"

"The man from Sylva Buggy Factory has just slipped around to the back lot with the prettiest little black pony and white canopy-top buggy you ever say. He has been teasing me to buy, but, of course, I would not think of paying two hundred and fifty dollars for a present. But, really, it is a bargain. Just go out and see it."

He passed out the back doorway, and Mrs. Warren joined the girls on the front, detaining them until they were called in by the breakfast bell.

Dr. Warren awaited them at table, and, as they entered, he said,

"Little girls, accept from your brother and guardian his sincerest wishes for a happy birthday. And may you now and in the future — 'in the ages to come' — receive the wishes of your hearts."

"Thank you," was murmured as two blushing faces were turned inquiringly to each other, and two pairs of eyes cast futive glances on him, which he pretended not to see.

Mrs. Warren was one of those strangely perfect housekeepers, and, if "cleanliness is next to godliness," she could claim a seat among the saints, provided there were no other requirements. On this May morning the interior of the house was in perfect harmony with the exterior, and the perfume-laden breeze, creeping through crack and crevice, found no particle of dust. Even the Irish maid in her white dress and cap, flitting around in airy lightness, seemed a part of the perfect whole. A white cook, imported from the North, presided in the kitchen. And, if there was one thing lacking in the household arrangements, it was not visible to the naked eye.

After years of work, Dr. Warren looked on the place as a haven of rest, and resolved to make the most of his forced retirement. While he had no thought of practice, he expected to keep in full touch with the medical world, and had already formulated plans for a small office and laboratory, which he soon erected in a far corner of the front yard.

After breakfast the girls were adroitly drawn to the front, and the expectant listeners soon heard the screams of delight, and at once joined the happy couple at the gate.

Ray had her arms around the pony's neck, while Reba patted his head with a timid hand. Attached to the bridle was a card, with "To Reba and Ray from Mother and Brother" written on it.

"Oh, Ray, it is for you, too!" cried Reba generously.

"No, Reba, it is yours, all yours. But I appreciate the kind remembrance." Ray turned suddenly, and caught a glimpse of disfavor in Mrs. Warren's face, that she found it difficult to forget.

"Now, girls," said Dr. Warren, "I shall expect you both to learn to care for the outfit yourselves, to learn to hitch and unhitch, for I never felt that a woman had any business driving until she understood every piece of the harness."

Reba stepped into the buggy, and took the lines, but Ray turned toward the house, and was gone just in time to hide the tears that had been welling up since she had seen Mrs. Warren's malevolent expression.

"Poor child. No doubt she is thinking of other birthdays," commented the older woman, as she took her seat by Reba's side.

For some time after they had driven off Dr. Warren stood leaning against one of the iron gates, gazing into vacanacy.

"Again those strange, sad, mystic eyes, with their lasting appeal, are haunting me, and more persistent than ever," he murmured. It was the influence of The Jessamines and memory's processes of association. As if to free himself from the mesmeric influence, he walked rapidly about the yard. Just as he reached the gate again, the draymen drove up with Ray's trunk, and he assisted in taking it up to her room.

"Ray," he said, after the negro had departed, "I'll unstrap your trunk, and this is a good time for you to unpack and arrange your things."

She faced him with surprise, but checked herself in the act of telling him that she had never done such a thing, and knew not how to begin. However, her helpless expression conveyed the thought, and he said with decision,

"You must learn to wait on yourself, and not be dependent on others."

He left the room, and she opened the trunk. Garment after garment was taken out, until she came to a smooth layer of domestic at the bottom.

"Under this," she said to herself, "are my clothes for next year, and Aunt Helen told me not to touch them until they are needed, and not to remove them until next spring, when I should find my Easter suit complete, except the hat."

Rising from her kneeling posture, she opened the bureau drawers, and filled them with dainty underwear. Dresses and wraps were hung in closet and wardrobe. Toilet articles were placed on dresser and table. Books and photos were properly arranged, until the room possessed an air of individuality of which she felt quite proud.

# CHAPTER XVII

## YOUTH

THE following week the two girls entered school at Sylva Institute, and created the usual stir of excitement among the student-body. One stage whisper, "The Yanks are acomin'," greeted them as they entered.

Spring and summer passed without leaving any special footprints on The Jessamines. The inmates had become adjusted to their surroundings, and things moved on in their natural course.

However, Mrs. Warren's dislike for Ray was apparent to all except Dr. Warren, who thought she was only doing her duty toward his ward. But Mrs. Warren, in her effort to do her duty, frequently made it convenient to be standing at Ray's door when her step-son passed, and by some way only a designing woman could invent call his attention to the untidy room. Again she would stand with martyr-like expression and say, "Reba, leave your music, and take Ray's books from the front porch, and put them where they belong." And to the maid she would call, and say, "Maggie, leave your work, and go sew the buttons on Ray's shoes."

Then there would follow a conference between Dr. Warren and his ward. One day, after receiving a severe lecture, Ray looked into his face, and said,

"Dr. Warren, I certainly do try. I'd love to be nice and particular like Reba, but it just seems impossible. I clean up my room as nicely as she does, but it won't stay cleaned,

and I often resolve not to leave my books and bonnet in the hall, but before I know it there they are again, and I just can't help myself."

The pathetic little figure, standing alone and pleading guilty, was too much for Dr. Warren, so, to keep from apologizing, he made a hasty retreat.

"She is not lazy. She is always working at something," he said to himself.

Reba Warren, like her mother, was a natural-born housekeeper, and found pleasure in the things that were harrowing to Ray. The former delighted in interior work, the latter found equal pleasure in outside employment. While Reba swept the floors and polished the furniture, Ray swept the yard and weeded the flowers. One was given credit for what she did, the other was condemned for what she failed to do.

By the time school opened in the fall the two girls had become general favorites with the young people of Sylva, and The Jessamines, with its shaded yard and croquet ground, was the most popular home in town.

Dr. Warren had likewise made friends. He had at once identified himself with the people, and his friendly bearing soon dissipated the sectional feeling of the day.

On the last Saturday in October he stood in his room upstairs, looking down on a group of happy young folk below, and for the first time in the thirty-three years of his life he envied youth.

"Why," asked he of himself, "Have I had no youth, no young manhood? Does knowledge — does service for others atone for this loss?"

With a yearning expression he looked into the mirror, and searched the image that confronted him. A splendidly

shaped head, with a full suit of dark auburn hair, revealed not even a thread of grey. The skin, fair and ruddy, was as smooth as a woman's. The thin, red lips were stern in repose, but when parted in a smile were tender as a child's. And, notwithstanding a heavy beard and mustache, the mouth was never hidden. The eyes, by far the strongest of his features, evaded description from the fact that no two people saw them alike. In color they ranged from blue to black, and changed with every changing mood. If "the mirror of the soul" was ever applicable to eyes, it certainly applied to those of Dr. Warren. They spoke right out from a fountain of truth, and possessed a power, that even he failed to realize. To a great extent they held the secret of his wonderful influence over his patients. From under dark arched brows they looked out keen, cold, and cutting as steel — then, again, soft, gentle, and persuasive as a mother's. In stature he was tall and straight, weighing one hundred and ninety pounds, but so perfectly proportioned as to give the appearance of much less weight.

His thirty-fourth birthday was still several months off, but, never having had the rejuvenating influence of youthful companionship, he imagined himself an old man. And yet something within rebelled at the verdict.

In compliance with Professor Lauder's request, he had since the opening of the fall term been lecturing to the sophomore and junior classes on physiology, and the personal contact with the young people had aroused an interest that had hitherto been unknown to the busy physician. Thus the inquiry — "Why have I had no youth, no young manhood?"

While Dr. Warren was still studying his reflection in the mirror, he was attracted to the window by a heated con-

troversy below. Elbert Odell, of Savannah, was insistent with his demand of "Let Miss Alma West settle it!"

"Oh, no, I know nothing of the rules of croquet," protested the designated young lady, glancing up, and seeing Dr. Warren above. Raising her hand, she pointed to him, and the next instant all were demanding his presence on the ground.

As Dr. Warren emerged from the hall doorway, he was greeted by a dozen excited voices, all relating at once the pros and cons of the tangled situation, out of which he was expected to extricate them. But, not being a woman, he could not understand the medley of voices. Looking with helpless appeal from one excited face to another, his eyes rested on Ray Harrison, apparently the most excited of the group.

Without hesitation she moved through the crowd, and unconsciously laid one hand on his chest, while with the other she gesticulated, as she gave an unbiased statement of the contested point.

Looking into her flushed face and sparkling eyes, Dr. Warren quietly asked,

"Why not consult the rules?" He pointed to the book of directions in the box.

Exchanging shamed glances, the young people made a dash for the book, which settled the disputed question. The delayed game was resumed.

"Why are you not a participant in this exciting game?" asked Dr. Warren of Alma West, as he took a seat on the rustic bench by her side.

"Because I'm a stranger to this and all other games. To be able to sit idly by, and see others enjoy it is a rare treat to me."

This unexpected answer aroused his interest in the quiet

girl, whom he had singled out as the best student in the physiology class.

"Oh, I'm making no complaint," she continued, with confusion, as she met his penetrating eyes with her own. They seemed to be demanding a confidence his lips refused to request. "I . . . I am only too glad of the opportunity to study, and must avail myself of it. I should not have come this afternoon, but Professor Lauder insisted on it. He said I'd break down under too much work."

Looking into her strong, determined face, Dr. Warren abruptly remarked,

"Professor Lauder asked me if a fifteen-year-old girl could study two foreign languages, and take the normal course in addition to the regular class studies, without jeopardizing her health. Miss Alma, are you that girl?"

"I'm nearly sixteen," she responded, as her eyes dropped before his gaze.

"Even if you stand the terrible physical test," continued Dr. Warren, "you are paying too great a price for your education — far greater than you now realize. And, while I have no desire to disparage or underrate knowledge, I do say, take time! You have many long years for its acquisition, but remember that you have only one short period of youth. Enjoy it while you can. It is your birthright, and should not be bartered for a mess of pottage in the form of ambition, for ambition is a comorant, whose appetite is never appeased. The more you feed it, the stronger its demands."

The girl felt embarrassed, and shifted under the bombardment of advice.

"Dr. Warren," she began, in reply, "I thank you for your interest, but I cannot take your advice. You might as well preach moderation to the desert traveler, who finds him-

self by the long-sought pool, realizing the water might vanish, and float like a mirage beyond his reach, leaving him to suffer the torture of his unquenched thirst. Yes. . . . I've heard the siren voice of Youth, but, like Ulysses, I'm compelled to seal my ears until I've passed out of hearing.

"But, Dr. Warren, since you manifest an interest in my welfare, I can show you in a few words how far removed my life is from those light-hearted young people out there. To give me this opportunity of my schooling, I fear my father shortened his life. He sacrificed the comforts of our mountain home, and went to work in a sawmill, which necessitated his sleeping out-of-doors. For years he had serious heart trouble, and the doctors said that he must have the closest care. But he ignored their advice, and subjected himself to hardships that I might go to school.

"Seven months after I left home he was found dead in his blanket on the mountainside near his work. But, by some strange chance, his body was found by a stranger, to whom our sad story was related. This stranger offered the money to complete my education. I do not even know his name, but some day I shall repay him every cent with interest. But my father I can never repay. My frail little mother is now supporting herself and my little brother by her own labor. Now, Dr. Warren, can you wonder that I feel like a criminal for idling away even this afternoon?"

Dr. Warren noticed that her eyes were moist, and that she spoke with a tremor as she concluded.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Alma," he said, "I have acted the part of the foolish physician, who prescribes the remedy without knowing the disease. If I can be of service, please call on me."

"Thank you, Dr. Warren. That means much to a girl in my position."

Dr. Warren arose, and went back into the house, while Alma West fell to dreaming, oblivious to the joyousness of the youth being manifest in the croquet game.

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## CHAPTER XVIII

## BOWLEGS

IT was housecleaning day at The Jessamines, a cold, blustering March day, and Saturday. The moon was right, and, therefore, housecleaning had to go forward, regardless of other conditions. Carpets and rugs were swinging in the breeze, and brightly colored quilts were waving like weather signals on the coast.

For the inmates of the house the day was characterized by all the misery that features such occasions. By mid-afternoon family and servants were exhausted, except the inexhaustible Mrs. Warren. This was her day of glory. With bright eyes and expanded nostrils, she charged like the thoroughbred in the lead of a mighty race.

Reba, with dust-cap and apron, soon found her place, and moved with the current. But to poor little Ray the experience was excruciating. Having risen early in the morning with the feeling that she was to help, efforts were made to do so, but it wasn't long before the realization came, that she was in everybody's way. Timidly approaching Mrs. Warren, who was passing down the hallway with a large mirror in her arm, she asked,

"Will you please tell me what to do?"

"Get out of my way, and do anything you wish. The house is to be cleaned from dome to cellar." And the elder lady was indeed irate.

Turning in another direction, the girl was almost

knocked down by a large mattress, coming from the back bedroom, from the midst of which she heard a muffled voice cry,

"Get out of my way, child!"

With a feeling of desperation, she fled to the dining-room, and found it vacant. She could clean this room without being in the way.

"It is not soiled. There is not a speck of dirt anywhere. But that makes no difference. It has got to be cleaned."

Calling to her aid all the knowledge derived from Mammy Dilsey's housecleanings, she remembered that the first essential was sand—plenty of good sand for scrubbing. Going to the front walk, she gathered up a full gallon of this necessary cleaning expedient, and distributed it over the dining-room floor. She then tucked her dress up, tying it about her waist with a string, though it was already two inches above her high shoe-tops. But that was what Mammy Dilsey used to do.

With a bucket of water, the disciple of Mammy Dilsey advanced to the middle of the room, and was in the act of pouring it over the floor, when she was arrested by a shriek from the direction of the door. It was so loud and so piercing, that it quickly brought all the occupants of the house to the scene.

"What have you done? Oh, what have you done to my beautiful polished floor?" There was a mixture of distress and contempt in the voice of Mrs. Warren.

Too frightened to speak, Ray stood with the uplifted bucket as if about to faint.

"Give it to me, dear," whispered Reba, advancing to her side, and relieving her of the bucket of water.

"Get off!! Get off that sand before you grind it into

the floor!!" screamed Mrs. Warren. And Dr. Warren, convulsed with laughter, ran from the house.

Feeling much like a condemned criminal, Ray crept to the yard, and sank to the ground at the foot of one of the large oak trees. But, erelong, the mistress of the house had occasion to pass that way. She stopped suddenly, and scanned the dejected little figure, as if beholding her for the first time. Then, as she walked off, she remarked derisively,

"It is strange to me how some people can take their ease in indolence, while other people work themselves to death."

With a haunted, terrified look, the miserable girl arose to resume her duties in the house. But, just before reaching the steps, she stopped with indecision. Then, suddenly, as if impelled by some mad desire to escape from everything, without a thought as to her destination, she rushed on for a half-mile.

Finding herself in a pine thicket, she threw her body down on the thick, brown carpet of straw, and the pent-up tears burst forth with one long wail—"Dad! Mammy Dilsey! Why did you leave me?"

As she lay there weeping, her lonely heart called for the past as never before. The Jessamines, with all of its beauty, became repulsive, and she dreaded to return.

"Oh, if they only had negroes, and not those white servants!"

Presently she heard a rustle in the pine straw, and then—

"Ith you hongry?" came from somewhere in soft, sympathetic tones, that fell like balm on her bruised heart.

"Yes, I am hungry," she answered, sitting up, and

wiping the tears from her eyes, at the same time looking for the source of the voice.

Through a crack in a rail fence, just three feet away, peeped a pair of bright, black eyes, and a little black hand protruded, as the same childish voice said,

"Bite."

A tiny, half-eaten raw potato was offered.

Ray grabbed the hand, like that of a long lost friend, and with a hysterical laugh she said,

"I'm not hungry for anything to eat. But where did you come from?"

"F'om de 'tater patch. Nobody don' keer, 'caze dey done dug de 'taters," he answered, with fright, as the hand was hastily withdrawn.

"Certainly, no one cares, and I'll give you all the potatoes you want," said Ray, reassuringly.

With confidence restored, he crawled through a larger crack in the fence, and stood by her side. Searching her face, he asked,

"Doth you live at de big 'outh?"

"Yes."

"Ith dey quality?"

"Yes, they're quality—that is, I suppose so."

She was smiling.

"Deyth got white niggers." And no greater contempt could possibly be expressed, than was embodied in those two words, "white niggers." But the ugly expression passed from his face, as he asked,

"What'th yo' name?"

"My name is Ray. What is yours?"

"Bowlegs."

"Bowlegs What?"

"Jeth Bowlegs."

"But what is your pa's name?" she asked, to prolong the interview.

"I aint got no pa."

"Where is he? Is he dead?"

"No'm, I jeth never ith had no pa."

"Well, have you a ma?"

"Yeth'm."

"What is her name?"

"Peachy, and Peachy ith thick." The little darkie sighed, and started to leave. Reluctant to lose sight of him, Ray asked,

"Where are you going, Bowlegs?"

"Dwine ter dig 'taters fer Peachy. Peachy aint had no dinner."

As he started off, Ray followed. On emerging from the shadow of the pines, Bowlegs struck up a little, lively trot. But in a moment he was brought to a sudden stop by a shriek of laughter from Ray. On seeing his legs she recognized the origin of his name. They looked exactly like iron rods, that had been molded around a small nail keg.

He turned back, facing her, and his ludicrous appearance evoked another outburst of laughter. His round bullet-shaped head was entirely too large for the rest of his body. And his jolly black face, so expressive of good humor, made her laugh to even look at him.

Regardless of the cool day, his entire costume consisted of a last summer's shirt, which, no doubt, was originally long and loose. But at this particular time it struck Bowlegs just below the knees, and the cool March wind played a tattoo with its fringed edges. Its strength and capacity were se-

verely tested by an abdominal pressure, that might at any moment prove too much for its power of endurance.

"Bowlegs, where is the potato patch?" asked Ray finally.

"Here 'tith," he answered, pointing to the clearing around them, which, in reality, had served in the capacity of potato patch the preceding year.

"Oh, but there are no potatoes here now," dissuaded Ray, as Bowlegs picked up an old piece of hoe.

"Jeth wait, an' I thow you." And the little darkie attacked the earth beneath him precisely as though he were killing snakes.

But no potatoes appeared, and Bowlegs jumped to another place. After several changes with like results an expression of disappointment overcast his face.

"Bowlegs, it is getting too dark for us to see now, so you had better quit, and come back in the morning," advised Ray.

"But Peachy aint had no dinner, an' I ith hongry, too." There were pitiable contortions of his face, as he strove to keep back the tears, whereupon Ray, herself, took the hoe, and began digging.

Then, lo! a potato loomed in sight, and Ray, encouraged by her success and the hungry eyes of Bowlegs, dug until her hands were blistered. Finally she stopped, and picking up four potatoes of rather large proportions, spread them across her palm, and said,

"I think these will be enough for yours and Peachy's supper."

Bowlegs received the potatoes eagerly.

"Is Peachy very sick, do you think?"

"Yeth'm."

"Does she live down at the negro quarters?"

"Yeth'm."

"Well, I'll be down there to see her tomorrow, and I'll bring her something to eat. Would you like for me to bring you something, too, Bowlegs?"

He said nothing, but words are powerless to convey the anticipated delight depicted on his face.

"What must I bring you—citron custard?"

"Donno what dat ith."

"Well, what about pound cake?"

"Donno what dat ith."

"Oh, well, then, you must tell me what you want. What is the very best thing you know of?"

Striking an attitude of rigidity, and assuming a trance-like expression, as if gazing on the ambrosial fruits of the gods, he smacked his lips, and blurted out,

"Hog'th hind leg."

For a moment Ray looked at the little negro in deep perplexity. When she realized that he meant nothing other than ham, she shrieked with laughter, and rushed off in the direction of The Jessamines.

## CHAPTER XIX

## "FREE, OR A HUNDERD"

AFTER the household had partly recovered from the onslaught of the day, Reba joined her mother and brother in the library, and asked, "Where is Ray?"

"I have no idea, but the chickens are calling for their supper, and she understands that she is to feed them. Always disappearing at the most inopportune time," complained Mrs. Warren.

"I saw Ray go out of the back gate a couple of hours ago," was Dr. Warren's parting information, as he started out to feed the chickens. With a bucket of food, he entered the fowl-yard, and called, "Chick! Chick! Chickee!"

But, instead of a happy, noisy greeting, the chickens ran off in suspicion, and waited for him to leave before eating the corn he had scattered. However, as he started out of the gate, a big brood of orphaned biddies ran under his feet, reminding him that they were entitled to special attention. They were of white leghorn stock, and Ray's pets. Hurrying into the house, he secured for them a cup of grits. When this food was gone, they threw back their little heads, opening up a louder, more persistent cry than before. Dr. Warren heeded their call of distress, and held out his hands to them. As they came picking at his fingers, he cuddled them up as he had seen Ray do.

"Even you, little biddies, crave something more than food," said he, thinking of the orphan girl in his care.

On taking a seat at the supper table a little later, Dr. Warren remarked,

"I'm surprised at Ray's staying out so late."

"You might as well make up your mind to be surprised at nothing, for there is no telling what she is going to do, and, whether good or bad, it is sure to be different from what you expected," was emphatically affirmed by Mrs. Warren.

"Yes, she is a peculiar child, but less trouble than we anticipated, don't you think, Mother?"

Then Reba interrupted feelingly,

"Trouble? Ray is no trouble! The Jessamines would be awful without her."

Ignoring her daughter's remark, Mrs. Warren said,

"Less trouble of the kind I expected, and more of the kind I did not expect. Think of a girl nearly fourteen years of age jumping on a horse, and riding astride at break-neck speed all over that pasture, like a wild Indian! And the other day, when Colonel Burton called to see you, I had company, and sent Ray to receive and entertain him till you came. Directly, I heard him apologize for detaining her from the ladies, and she boldly answered, 'Oh, I much prefer talking to you, for I like men so much better than women.' Now, of course, her lack of modesty is a reflection on me, but what am I to do? Then I undertook to reprove her by asking why she preferred the society of men to that of ladies, and she unblushingly answered, 'Because they talk about things I understand and like, instead of servants, babies, and styles—none of which I ever had.' I see you consider it amusing, but to me it is no laughing matter," she concluded with a flush, as she witnessed the half-sarcastic merriment of Dr. Warren's attitude.

"I beg your pardon, Mother," he explained, "I was only thinking of Mrs. Cypress and her daughter, whom I have heard called, Parrot and Echo, and I could not refrain from smiling over their horror at hearing Ray's speech." He turned, and called, "Maggie!—Will you please see if Ray is coming?"

"Here I am, and I have had such a good time!" cried Ray, springing into the room. Her eyes were swollen, and tear-marks were visible on the cheeks, but that she "had had such a good time" was self-evident. Her very being was a joy-emitting battery, and all felt the power of its influence. The threatening atmosphere of a moment before vanished at her approach, and her exuberant good humor was so contagious, that even Mrs. Warren was not proof against it. She, too, had to join the general laughter over Bowlegs and the "hog's hind leg."

On Monday morning, after Ray's discovery of Bowlegs, she went out to feed two sick, motherless pigs, that she had persuaded Dr. Warren to give her, instead of having them killed, as he had ordered done.

The pen was under a large apple tree in the pasture, just back of the house. As Ray approached, with the pan of gruel, Bowlegs advanced from the opposite direction, and met her at the pen.

"Hello, Bowlegs! How is Peachy this morning?" she inquired, mounting the step, and pouring the feed into the pig-trough.

"Peachy ith moth well, an' ith gwine ter Unc' Mike'th 'outh, whar she kin git thomepin t'eat."

"But what is she going to do with you? Where are you going to get anything to eat while she is away?"

"I tol' Peachy you wath agwine ter git me thomepin'," he announced with confidence.

"Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll make a trade with you. If you'll feed my pigs every day while I'm at school, I'll see that you get something to eat while Peachy is gone."

"Yeth'm. Muth I feed 'em free time, or a hunderd?"

"Oh, I only want you to feed them at noon each day. I'm going to show you all about it directly."

"Jeth free time?" he asked with perplexity.

"No, not three times. Only one time. When you hear the farm bell ring for dinner, then you may know that you must feed my pigs. Do you understand?"

"Yeth'm."

But on better acquaintance with Bowlegs, Ray learned that his consciousness conceived of only two numerals, and these were called respectively three and one hundred, or, more exactly, "free" and "one hunderd," the first representing a small number and the latter a large one.

"I want you to help me get my pigs fat," said Ray, as Bowlegs looked over the other side of the pen.

"Dey'th mighty little, 'cept dey head. Dey hin' legth aint no bigger'n a chicken'th drum-'tick."

After a peal of laughter, Ray said,

"Yes, in spite of all I can do, their bodies continue to get smaller and their heads larger. But, if you will help me, I believe we can fatten them yet."

"Yeth'm, I'th gwine ter he'p you."

That afternoon, as Ray entered the front gateway on her return from school, Bowlegs emerged from behind the cape jessamine hedge, and announced,

"Mith Ray, come an' sthee de pigth. I'th got 'em jeth ath fat."

With a premonition of evil, Ray handed her books to Reba, and followed the darkie to the pen.

"Oh, Bowlegs, what have you done to my pigs?" She looked agonizingly on the extended bodies of the two pigs, and heard with terror their groans of misery.

"I'th got 'em fat." Bowlegs' pride was evident. "I'th fed 'em a hunderd time."

"But I only gave you feed for one time. Where did you get anything else?"

"F'om her," pointing to a fine Jersey cow, grazing nearby.

"Oh, Bowlegs, don't you know Mrs. Warren will get you?"

"Yeth'm, but sthe won't know it. Sthee dar? Dey'th axin' fer thome mo'." Reaching under the pen, Bowlegs lifted a small bucket, half full of warm, rich milk, and poured it into the trough before Ray could stop him.

"Dey'th gittin' fatter," he pronounced, as the pigs began to swell with further imbibing of the milk, until Ray thought, resignedly, that they would have to burst.

"It will kill or cure," she said with a laugh, as the last drop was consumed.

From that very day the pigs began to take on a portly dignity, their bodies soon catching up with their heads. By fall each weighed about two hundred pounds. Many times during the summer Ray heard animated discussions over the failure of the Jersey cow, but in these discussions she was careful to take no part, easing her conscience by assuring herself, "The hogs will repay them for the milk."

. . . . . .

"Come in!" said Dr. Warren, a month later, to Ray's knock at his office door. "What can I do for you?" His

eyes rested with pleasure on the girlish form in the doorway.

"I want five dollars, please," requested Ray.

Deliberately closing his medical journal, and drawing her to the chair by his side, her guardian said,

"I regret to refuse you the money, but, unless you show some good reason why you should have it, I fear I must do so. You know I told you and Reba, that you would have to make out on five dollars a month each for your spending money, and it's hardly two weeks since I gave you that amount."

Then Ray, goaded by his refusal, demanded peevishly to know what she was worth in her own name.

"No, I will not tell you what you are worth, for that has nothing to do with it. If you were worth a million, I'd pursue the same course."

Five weeks later Dr. Warren was standing at the door of the one dry-goods store in Sylva, when the proprietor called to him,

"Dr. Warren, do you wish to take this suit of clothes out with you?"

"What suit of clothes?"

"The boy's outfit Miss Ray bought. Here it is." He produced, not only the suit, but hat and shoes as well, all for a seven-year-old boy.

With an incredulous air, Dr. Warren asked,

"Did I understand you to say, that my ward, Ray Harrison, bought those articles?"

"Certainly, sir. That's what I said. She bought them for that little bow-legged nigger, that follows her around like her shadow."

"I beg your pardon, I understand. Wrap them up, please. What is the bill?"

"The bill is ten dollars, but she paid it."

"Two whole months' allowance," whispered Dr. Warren on his way home. "What a peculiar child! Yes, whether good or bad, it is certainly to be the unexpected."

## CHAPTER XX

## SHELLEY'S "CLOUD"

THE first week in June found Sylva donned in her gala attire. Commencement was on, the supreme event of the year. Teachers and pupils moved about with a consequential air. It was Monday, and the sophomores had the right of way.

After devoting an hour to her daughter's toilet, Mrs. Warren hurried into Dr. Warren's room, and said,

"If Ray is not ready in five minutes, I shall take Reba on to the Institute, for Professor Lauder wishes them to get there early. Instead of dressing, Ray has been running around, interesting herself over that monkey, Bowlegs, and his new suit, as if he, instead of herself, were to appear on the stage today. But I'm going to tell her, that, if she doesn't come on at once, I'll leave her, for I am not going to have Reba flurried by being late."

"Wait, Mother. Say nothing to her. But just take Reba on, and I'll bring Ray as soon as she is ready."

As Mrs. Warren turned to the kitchen to give some final orders about dinner, Reba emerged from her room, and stood before her brother. She was dressed in spotless white, looking as pure and fragile as an Easter lily. With a pink flush, she met Dr. Warren's admiring gaze, and said,

"I'm so glad you like my dress."

"I have not seen your dress," he replied, folding her in his arms, and imprinting a kiss on her cheek.

Without a word, Dr. Warren helped Reba and her mother into the buggy, and handed them the reins. As they started off, Bowlegs slipped from under the seat, and rolled to the ground like a ball.

"I thought you were going to hold the horse," said Reba, looking inquiringly into the black face.

"No'm, I'th Mith Ray'th nigger." And, like a flash, he turned away, moving as fast as his bowlegs and new shoes would carry him.

"Are you almost ready?" called Dr. Warren at Ray's door, on entering the house again.

"Plum' ready, except this hair-ribbon, and my arms are too short to reach it. Will you please try your hand?"

Giving him a broad piece of white satin ribbon, she turned her back to Dr. Warren, and said,

"Please tie it in a double bow-knot over the string."

He complied, and then asked,

"How will that do?"

Stepping back to the mirror, she looked steadily at her reflection for an instant, and remarked,

"It won't do at all. Don't you see that one end is heap longer than the other?"

"Oh, but you didn't tell me about the ends. Let me try it again."

"Now, that is right." She looked appreciatively at him. "Please fasten those two buttons. I can't reach them either." He again complied, and she said, "Thank you! Thank you ever so much!" dancing out into the middle of the floor. "Now, Dr. Warren, how do I look? Is my dress too short, do you think?"

"No. . . . Yes. . . . I don't know. But, of course, Mother knows better than I about such things."

"But she hasn't seen it. This is my Easter dress, that Aunt Helen made me before I left . . . home. It was raining, and I did not wear it Easter, so I saved it for commencement. She told me that it would have to be lengthened, if I grew much, but I forgot it. Have I grown very much, Dr. Warren?"

"Yes, a good deal. But, Ray, why are you not wearing the dress that Mother made you?"

"She has never made me a dress."

"Do you mean to say, that Mother made no preparation for you, that she knows nothing of what you are to wear today?"

"Yes, those are the facts. However, she thinks she knows. Two weeks ago she told me to bring all of my white dresses to let her select one for me to wear today. After looking through them, she chose the plainest one, and said that I must press it, and have it ready. Had she manifested any further interest in my appearance, I should have shown her this dress—this suit. But she was busy with Reba's, and I'm learning to depend on myself, as you said I must. Miss Bates requested us to dress in pure white, but said, if we preferred, we could add a little dash of pink or blue. And you know pink is my color."

"Yes, there is no doubt about that," he said, as his eyes passed over the pink-clad form.

She wore a gauzy, pink-lace dress over a rose-colored pink slip. Her feet were clad in dainty white kid slippers, while her silk stockings matched in color the delicate glow of the dress.

"Instead of white with a dash of pink, you have substituted pink with a dash of white, but I don't think Miss Bates will object to the change."

The beauty of the girl had enthralled him as completely as that of the child had done nine years before. As he gazed on the flawless face, the intervening years seemed to vanish, and he looked again upon the little fairy queen, the "beautiful spoiled child" of the past.

But the illusion was of short duration, for, instead of the innocent brown eyes, and the sweet childish voice saying, "Dr. Warren, I'm so sorry you're blind," Ray threw up her hands to shut out his admiration, and to shut in her blushes. By that act he realized that the past had gone forever, and taken with it her unconscious childhood. The girl before him was

"Standing with reluctant feet
Where the brook and river meet."

Without a further word, he took her hand, and they walked to the buggy in silence.

"Ray," he said, just before they reached the Institute, "I should like for you to bring Alma West home with you today. And I understand Mrs. Odell, of Savannah, is in town. I requested Mother to invite her to The Jessamines. Don't forget her kindness after the hotel fire."

"I won't forget. Is Elbert coming, too?"

"Yes, but why do you ask?" He was impatient in his inquiry, without knowing why.

"I ask, because I wish to know. I like Elbert better than any boy in our class, and I'd love to have him come."

They drew up before the double-storied, plain, wooden structure, known as the Institute.

"I tie'm, Marse War'n, I tie'm!" exclaimed Bowlegs, with a broad grin as he slipped from the back of the buggy, and ran around to the horse's head.

"Get away, chap, you're too little."

But the disappointment depicted on the black face caused Dr. Warren to ask,

"Do you know how to fasten a horse properly?"

"Yeth, thir-r-r! Mith Ray done l'arnt me. An' I kin hitch'm up, too. Ax her." He was pointing at Ray.

"You certainly can, Bowlegs, but you had better go over there, and take care of Black Beauty, and let Dr. Warren fasten Dandy, for he is not accustomed to you, and might bite or kick you."

As Dr. Warren and Ray entered the vestibule leading to the upstairs chapel, they came face to face with Mrs. Odell and Elbert. After cordial greetings, Dr. Warren said,

"Come, Mrs. Odell, let me conduct you to my mother, for these young people are needed behind the scenes."

The band struck up a popular air, and the curtain rose on a beautifully decorated stage, with a stage-setting of green woodland scenery. In the front row of chairs sat nine girls in their early 'teens, all dressed in purest white, except the one dash of pink in the center. And just to their rear, in full view of the audience, was an equal number of boys.

When Mrs. Warren saw Ray, her face turned crimson, and, with her back to Mrs. Odell, she said in an undertone to her step-son,

"Why did you allow her to come in that garb to make herself ridiculous by its oddity?"

Without a change of expression, Dr. Warren replied,

"It was not my place to order, or countermand her costume. However, give yourself no anxiety, for the glances you see turned on her are not those of ridicule."

"Who," asked Mrs. Odell, turning to Dr. Warren, "is that splendid looking girl on the left, the one in the plain white dress, without ribbons?"

"That's Miss West, Miss Alma West, of Murray County, a girl for whom I have the strongest friendship, and for whom I predict a bright future. If I mistake not, the time will come when this Institute will delight to do her honor."

"She is fortunate in having your friendship, but, if Mrs. Warren does not look closely, that friendship might turn into something stronger, and she will have three, instead of two, remarkable girls on her hands."

Immediately Mrs. Odell realized that she had made a mistake in her inference, for her pleasantry evoked a resentment from Mrs. Warren, who said,

"He will hardly encumber me with further responsibilities. Besides, Dr. Warren is not a marrying man."

The morning exercises were gone through in a satisfactory manner to all. In the evening program Reba and Elbert played the bride and groom in a pretty little drama. Alma was the "Gypsie Countess" in another, and the closing number of the evening, Shelley's "Cloud," was recited by Ray.

Dressed in billowy waves of smoky tarleton, she advanced to the front of the stage, and, with perfect self-possession, stood for a moment, looking over the large audience. Her dark, wavy hair fell over white shoulders, and her brown eyes sparkled like stars, while her fair skin and blush-rose cheeks completed a picture as rare and beautiful as the Aurora Borealis, which she more truly typified than the rain cloud.

The audience was captivated, and not a whisper marred the perfect stillness. From the concealing folds of her dress she slowly raised a black banner, bearing the one word, "Cloud," and in a sweet, bell-like voice, that penetrated every nook of the large hall, she began,

"I bring fresh showers for the thirsting flowers,
From the seas and the streams . . ."

Not till the last line of the long poem was said, and Ray had disappeared behind the scenery was the silence broken.

On calling at the side door for Ray, Dr. Warren was met by Miss Bates, who asked in a prim, joyous manner,

"What did you think of our 'Cloud'?"

"I never dreamed that a rain cloud could be half so bright or beautiful," he replied.

## CHAPTER XXI

## THE JESSAMINES IN JEOPARDY

AFTER the high tension of commencement week, Sylva donned her vacation dishabille, and for awhile enjoyed the relaxation. But, as in all small college towns, time was reckoned according to the college annals, and Sylva was like a large establishment without calendar or clock.

However, the chronicles of The Jessamines were not dependent upon the college for progress or coloring. During the summer Dr. Warren learned that his mother, contrary to his instructions, had bought the home without a thorough investigation of its titles, and her mistake was liable to cost him the price paid, besides valuable improvements which he had made.

Attention to his danger was aroused by a pending law suit, instigated by the heirs, for the recovery of property sold under similar conditions as The Jessamines, though in the possession of innocent purchasers like himself. He employed a noted Atlanta lawyer, whose investigation at once revealed overwhelming evidence of rascality, even the deeds received by Mrs. Warren and her immediate predecessors being nothing but forgeries.

When this was made known Dr. Warren asked,

"What do you advise? Must I resign this valuable property without a fight?"

After a thoughtful silence, the lawyer replied,

"You may never be called upon to resign it. We'll

watch the outcome of the pending case. The judge's ruling may be in favor of the innocent purchaser. If not, you may never be disturbed in your possession, for my investigations have failed to produce a claimant. And the oldest citizens of the county say that George Nultee and his wife died without heirs."

"But, Colonel, you forget that I told you there was a baby."

"Yes, Dr. Warren, but your assertion of the fact can only be based on rumor."

"Unfortunately for me, I know it is not rumor. I know there was a baby girl, for I held her in my own arms."

"Is it possible? Then surely you can throw some light on this tangled subject, that will unravel the mystery."

"I know the mother died, and left a week-old babe. Otherwise, I'm as ignorant as yourself."

Then, in response to his attorney's impatient look of inquiry, Dr. Warren related the story of his night's experience at the deathbed of Mrs. Nultee, while he was a boy surgeon in Sherman's army. At the conclusion he was asked,

"But did you learn nothing of her former life? Were there no relatives spoken of during the night?"

"Let me see," said Dr. Warren, as if coming out of a hypnotic spell, "let me see. . . . Yes, the old negro nurse said there was a brother to whom the baby was to be given. But as to his name, or place of residence I know nothing. He probably lived nearby in an adjoining county."

However, to the lawyer's analytical mind this idea was not a very feasible one. He replied,

"If the brother lived in this section, do you suppose he would have no identity in the community? And would he have made no effort to hold this property for his sister's

child? My opinion is, that Mrs. Nultee's girlhood home was hundreds of miles away, and, if her brother and her child are living, they are too far removed to know anything of what is transpiring in middle Georgia. But I think it unreasonable to suppose that the brother is still living, and I doubt his ever having gotten out of the war. Of course, however, my suppositions cannot be accepted as facts. So my suggestion is—advertise in all the leading newspapers of the South for the brother and child of Mrs. George Nultee, of The Jessamines, or leave matters as they now stand. For, as I said, you may remain the undisputed owner of this splendid property."

"I wish you would act on the first course, for, Colonel, you are my attorney, not to keep me in possession of The Jessamines, but to prove me its legal owner, as I know myself to be morally so. If that little babe is living, and has been defrauded out of her rights, her claims are superior to mine. To her I will surrender the place, but to no one else. No!—to no one else, without contesting every inch of the ground, for which I have paid my money."

## CHAPTER XXII

## THE RICHTON HANGING

"MARTH WAR'N," ventured Bowlegs, peeping into Dr. Warren's office, "kin Peachy have de gray mule an' de ol' buggy ter drive to Richton nex' Friday?"

"Peachy is welcome to the gray mule, but I doubt if the old buggy can stand a trip of sixteen miles. However, she has my consent to try it. But, Bowlegs, what on earth calls Peachy to Richton this hot August weather?"

With delight and solemnity vieing with each other for possession of his countenance, Bowlegs said,

"Dey'th gwine ter give a big hangin' over dar. Dick Dawthon'th gwine ter be hung."

A few days later the eventful Friday arrived, and long before daylight a steady stream of negroes began to file by on their way to witness the execution of one of their color. Every available vehicle for miles around had been pressed into service, and filled to overflowing with a noisy gang of darkies. Their weird songs and hilarious jests produced a nerve-racking discord, that banished sleep, and caused the afflicted inmates of The Jessamines to arise long before their accustomed time.

Dr. Warren, when dressed, took a seat by his bedroom window, and began pondering over the peculiar lives and customs of the black race.

As he sat by his front window, Ray Harrison sat by one in the rear of the house. Looking down through a gray veil

of dawn, she saw the most forlorn picture she had ever beheld. Just below, perched on a large flat-topped box, sat Bowlegs, his garb and face suggesting sackcloth and ashes. For a long while Ray watched him in silence, well knowing the cause of his sorrow. His attitude was full of hopeless despair, while his hungry eyes followed the passers-by with all the eager longing of the banished angel beholding the lost paradise.

"Why wouldn't Peachy let you go to the hanging, Bowlegs?" asked Ray, finally, offering sympathy in the tone of her voice.

"'Caze I sthees sthperith," he returned, without changing his position.

Ray, believing his capacity to see spirits should not bar him from such longed-for bliss, suggested,

"Do you want to go very badly?"

"Yeth'm." As he looked up, Ray saw a big tear slipping from his blinking eyes.

"Don't cry, Bowlegs, and I'll take you after they all get off to Mooreville. They'll leave as soon as breakfast is over."

It was to be a day of shopping for the members of the Warren family. As they were leaving the house for the early morning train, Reba said,

"Ray, I'm sorry you will not go with us. I should enjoy the day much better were you with me."

"Thanks, Reba, but I'll have far more pleasure at home. So you must have a good time, and not think of me. Good-bye!"

As they left the front gate, Bowlegs came bounding from the rear. He had been home, and dressed up in his "store-bought" clothes. Going immediately to the barn, Ray and

the son of Peachy searched the stables for some animal of burden-bearing capacity.

"Bowlegs," called Ray from the hollow recesses of a corner stable, "I don't see how I can take you, for every mule is gone, and, you know, Black Beauty is at the veterinarian's. Are you sure you want to go very much?"

"Yeth'm." Ray thought she detected anxiety in his voice, "Mith Puth got a mule. Mebbe we kin git him."

"All right, then you go and ask Mrs. Bryant to lend him to me. While you're gone I'll grease the buggy. But hurry back, or we'll be too late for the hanging."

Such admonition was unnecessary. Bowlegs was already gone, and in an incredibly short time was back, leading a little mouse-colored animal, somewhat resembling a mule, and known over the neighborhood as Sam.

"Mith Puth sthay you gotter watch Stham, fer he'th twicky," informed Bowlegs, as the harness was adjusted, and the mule was placed between the shafts.

"Mrs. Wilson," said Ray to the cook, as she ran in to get her hat, "I won't be back for dinner." And out she skipped with no more thought of wrong than the twittering birds overhead.

On the road to Richton Ray was dominated by one idea —to give pleasure to the little negro. She was lost to self. Heat and dust were unnoticed, while the trip there and almost back was accomplished without incident.

But that afternoon, while on the return trip, when about three miles from The Jessamines, the mule took the bit in his teeth, laid his ears back on his neck, and deliberately turned from the road, taking one to the right, leading—Ray knew not where.

"Woa! Woa, Sam!" she cried, pulling on the reins with all her might.

Striking a dog trot, and proceeding on his self-chosen way, Sam paid no more attention to her, than did the proverbial chariot to the fly on its wheel.

"Bowlegs, where on earth is he going?" Ray was pulling madly at the reins.

"He'th gwine whar he'th gwine. Dat'th whar he'th gwine, an' he aint agwine nowhar elthe neider!" There was an air of finality in this rejoinder of Bowlegs.

"But he is liable to take us to—HALIFAX!"

All of the girl's weight was thrown on one of the reins, which seemed, perversely enough, to act merely as a stimulant to the odd animal. Ray's anxiety increased as she realized that each step must be retraced before they should ever reach The Jessamines.

"What must I do? What must I do?" she cried in desperation.

"Tell 'em ter head us," advised Bowlegs, pointing to an approaching vehicle about one hundred yards ahead.

Relaxing her hold, Ray waved a handkerchief, calling in a loud voice,

"Please catch my horse!"

Seeing the fluttering signal, and hearing the request, the occupants of the approaching buggy slackened their speed, and looked in every direction.

The two teams drawing near together, and nothing being done to aid her, Ray screamed in a voice of command and entreaty,

"Why don't you catch my horse?"

"Where *is* your horse?" asked a strange voice, whose owner scanned the distance.

"Here he is!" She jumped to her feet, and pointed to the mouse-colored mule, who was still unconcernedly trotting on.

Failing to understand the situation, but supposing her to be an inexperienced driver, who had become frightened over nothing, he assured,

"He won't hurt you. Don't be afraid."

"I'm *not* afraid, but I don't want to go this way! I want to go to Sylva!"

"Catch the mule!" suggested Elbert Odell, the driver of the newly-arrived team, understanding the situation, and laughing quietly, at the same time permitting his companion to jump from the buggy, and grab Sam by the bridle. Then he said to Ray in a formal manner,

"Miss Harrison, let me introduce you to your rescuer, Professor English, our new teacher of mathematics."

Instead of blushing and apologizing, Ray threw her head back, and gave a loud, merry laugh. After telling them of the "twick" the mule had played on her, Elbert and the new instructor joined in the laugh. Friendliest relations were straightway established between Ray and Professor English, who said to Bowlegs,

"Jump out, Snowball, and ride with Mr. Odell. I'll hold the ribbons over this thoroughbred while going back to town."

Just at sunset the two vehicles stopped in front of The Jessamines, and Ray jumped lightly from the buggy, telling Professor English to turn the mule over to Bowlegs. With a wave of her hand to the young man, she ran into the house just as the cavalcade of returning negroes was heard in the distance.

"Oh, you all beat me home," was her greeting in the doorway of the library.

"Where have you been, runaway?" asked Dr. Warren.

"To Richton. To the hanging," was the prompt reply, as she sank into a chair. "But, oh! I'm tired and hungry! By the way, Reba, I saw our new professor, and know we'll like him. He doesn't seem much older than Elbert Odell. If you are starting upstairs, will you please take my hat, for I'm too tired to make the trip."

She handed her hat to Reba, and met Mrs. Warren's gaze, concentrated on her with consuming hatred.

"Ray Harrison, do you mean to say that you have been to Richton today?" Her voice was threatening.

"Yes, Mrs. Warren, I have. Was there anything wrong in that?"

"Yes, you vulgarian! there was wrong in it. If you had an iota of decency, you would not ask that question. You are not fit for the association of the white race, much less, respectable people!" Then, losing all control of herself, the infuriated woman rose to her feet, and declared, "Either you or I leave this house! You shall no longer have it in your power to disgrace me or my child!"

"Be careful, Mother!" commanded Dr. Warren in his sternest voice.

"I've been careful too long, already! And I say to you, you will send that girl away from here, or you can turn your father's widow and child into the street!" With this, she rushed from the room, slamming the door behind her.

Ray had arisen, with the blood receding from her face.

"What have I done? Oh, Dr. Warren, what *have* I done?" she moaned, tottering to his side.

Taking her outstretched hands, he led her to a sofa, and took a seat by her side. But he made no effort to stop the tears that came pouring from her eyes. He realized that another crisis had come, and that he and the girl both needed time before rushing into the subject, that must be handled with tact and judgment.

For several months he had observed that his step-mother had failed in her promise to him, and had become unjust to his ward. But he had avoided the subject since the night of Ray's arrival. The fact that he had been deceived in his father's wife was a sore trial to him, and he recognized the fact that a bad situation confronted him.

"Stop crying now, Ray," he said presently, "and I'll tell you what you've done." He was kind, but firm. "You have committed a grievous offence. On an occasion like this, when negroes turn out en masse, I should think that intuition would teach every lady to remain indoors, and avoid the public highways like a pestilence. And, when I think of you mingling with that rough, disorderly mob, I'm surprised beyond expression—yes, and mortified over the taste, that would actuate you to witness a hanging, even under the most favorable circumstances."

"To witness a hanging? Dr. Warren, do you think I'd witness a hanging? I only went to take Bowlegs, and I told him he was not to mention the subject to me, and he has not. Neither did I mix with the crowd, for I was the last to get there, and the first to leave. In fact, I did not quite get there. I stopped on this side of Richton, and let Bowlegs walk in. I told him to hurry back the very minute the hanging was over. In the meantime, I fed the mule, and let him rest in the shade. And we would have been back an hour ago, if the mule had not acted contrary, and turned out of

the way. Now, Dr. Warren, where is the wrong in what I've done? I only wanted to give Bowlegs a little pleasure."

"No wrong in your intentions, Ray, but your judgment was at fault, while the consequences might have been serious."

"Yes, the consequences *have* been serious, but, if you will exonerate me from blame, I'm willing to suffer for my mistake. And, as much as I love The Jessamines, I'm ready to leave it."

"What are you talking about, child? You are not going to leave The Jessamines. It is your home."

"Would you have me remain in this house after what has taken place?" Her eyes were flashing. "My father trusted you, and did not believe you would subject his child to insult. Mrs. Warren has never treated me justly, and you know but little of what I suffer at her hands. I know you think she buys and sees to my clothes as she does Reba's, but she has never bought me a garment, and for eighteen months I have worn the clothes I brought here, except for shoes and hats I bought with the allowance you gave me. Reba has divided her allowance with me, and done all in her power to alleviate my unfortunate condition. I would mention these things only to convince you that I can endure it no longer."

"Ray," he said, with his lips drawn to whiteness, "you will never know what this knowledge has cost me. I see you have been the victim of a jealous woman's spite. But still I say, you must stay—Wait now! You will stay under different conditions. You will no longer be under Mrs. Warren's jurisdiction. In future you may look to me for everything. I'll arrange with some lady down town for the making of your clothes, and I'll order one of the merchants to let you have what you need. Now, dry your eyes, and come

on, and have supper, for I heard you say you were hungry. Yes, I mean that exactly. You are no longer under Mrs. Warren's control or direction. Of course, you will show her the courtesy that is due from one lady to another, while she will treat you with the consideration due a guest in my home. Now, does that suit you? Are you willing to do your part under the conditions stipulated?"

"Yes, Dr. Warren, but remember that I'm to look to you for everything—for everything, until I'm eighteen."

When they entered the dining-room, Mrs. Warren had already taken her seat at the table, but Reba's place was vacant throughout the meal.

Ray drank a glass of milk, and then quietly left the room, going to her bedroom upstairs.

When Dr. Warren had finished, he looked at his stepmother, and, without calling her name, said,

"I wish to see you in the library."

As she entered he handed her a chair, and, without preliminaries, began,

"My ward, Ray Harrison, is not to leave The Jessamines."

"So from that I infer that you want your sister and her mother to vacate."

"Your inference, then, is wrong, for I expect no such thing. My home is as much yours as it has ever been. The fact that you have failed in your promise does not justify me in breaking mine. But the question is, do you wish to remain in my home? If so, you are still its mistress. However, there are some stipulations in regard to Ray."

"Name them," she said contemptuously.

"So far as you are concerned, she is a guest in my home, and must be treated as such. As to her clothes, I

shall make provision for them. The remainder I assume myself, and you are relieved of the burden. Hoping I've made my meaning clear, the interview is ended."

With this Dr. Warren left the house.

## CHAPTER XXIII

## "BILLIE BOY AND CHARMING BILLIE"

IN returning from school one afternoon of the following September, Reba and Ray stopped in town to make a small purchase, and, in approaching the dry-goods store, found their way blocked by a good-sized crowd, gathered around a patent medicine wagon. An irresistible temptation to halt for the purpose of satisfying their ready curiosity assailed them.

The medicine vender progressed in his humdrum speech like a Ford over a Rocky road. Then, finally, he passed from his speech into song. Verse after verse was sung, each followed by the chorus,

"O, where have you been, Billie Boy, Billie Boy,
O, where have you been, charming Billie?"

As the girls turned to go, they beheld Bowlegs in the midst of the crowd, looking up into the singer's face with enraptured expression.

Late that afternoon, as Ray came out of the house to feed her pigs, she heard Bowlegs' voice making the air vibrate with—

"O, whar ith you gwine, Billie Boy, Billie Boy,
O, whar ith you gwine, charmin' Billie-e-e-e?"

When she had reached the pen, the singer turned to her, and said,

"I'th done named our pigth, Mith Ray."

"You have? What have you named them?"

"De red un ith named Billie Boy, an' de black un ith named Charmin' Billie." There was great pride in his voice. Furthermore, the hogs never knew any other names.

While Ray and Bowlegs stood, admiring the ravenous swine, Dr. Warren came up through the pasture, and stopped on the other side of the pen.

"Ray," he said, "you have performed a miracle on these hogs. They've already outgrown their pen, and must be turned out into the pasture."

Ray appreciated the tribute to her care.

One day in October the Methodist pastor and the presiding elder drove up to make a ministerial call at The Jessamines. The latter dignitary was an attractive, middle-aged widower, and he and Mrs. Warren were soon paired off. absorbed in a conversation of interest to themselves only.

On the opposite side of the extensive veranda the local preacher had been given a seat, and was discussing with Dr. Warren matters of universal interest. Ray happened to be located on the edge of the veranda, listening intently to the conversation, when she felt a touch on her arm. Looking around, she met the terrified countenance of Bowlegs, himself. In a trembling voice he told her,

"Mith Ray, I'th killed Billie Boy."

"You have killed Billie Boy? How did you kill him?" screamed Ray, springing to her feet.

"I'th hung him."

Dr. Warren started in a run for the pasture, with Ray and Bowlegs close on his heels.

As the visitors rose with excitement, the presiding elder asked,

"Who is it he has killed?"

"A boy, named Billie," returned the ministerial associate.

"It's no boy. It's a *hog!*" corrected Mrs. Warren in a disgusted manner.

When Dr. Warren and Ray reached the strangling hog, Dr. Warren jerked out his pocket-knife, and cut the rope from its neck. This brought Bowlegs to his knees. With his arms stretched over his reviving pet, he said, through sobs,

"Billie Boy, I didn' go ter kill you. I wath jeth aplayin' like you was Dick Dawthorn. Den you had ter pull back on de rope dat wath tied ter de apple tree, an' I couldn' git you looth. But, Billie Boy, if you'll be alive agin, I ith never gwine ter do it no mo'."

. . . . . .

Mrs. Warren's animosity was as apparent as ever, but she expressed only in looks what she dared not express in words. However, Ray's life had little room for hatred. She treated Mrs. Warren with the greatest consideration, never allowing the slightest deviation from the new order of things.

The changed conditions at The Jessamines brought her into closer touch with her guardian, and her dependence on him caused him to study her very carefully. He found under her pleasant, fun-loving disposition a strength of character that was truly wonderful. As soon as he gave her liberty to buy what she would, she demonstrated the fact that she held no desire to abuse the privilege.

Still Ray possessed one fault, that talk and time had been powerless to eradicate. After nearly two years in his home, she was no more of a housekeeper than when she came. And by some means, not hard to guess, this defect was kept constantly before him, and caused him considerable anxiety.

One afternoon in the early spring that followed he was sitting in his office, meditating over this blemish in her composition, when the object of his thoughts came in from school, and lingered in the yard nearby.

"Oh, Reba," she called, "aren't the cape jessamines lovely after the shower? If you'll take my hat and books in, I'll gather some for the vases."

As she reached a white dimpled hand, and broke one of the blossoms, Dr. Warren's gaze followed every graceful curve of her supple form, and saw the exquisite delight in her face, as she inhaled the perfume of her favorite flower. Then, as if afraid the picture might unfit him for the work he had assigned himself, he turned away, and called,

"Ray, I'd like to speak to you. Please come in for a few minutes."

The attractive girl stood before him, blushing and picking the flowers to pieces. It was difficult for the dignified and masculine physician to enter into the subject he wished to discuss. When she had taken a seat, he began, rather pompously,

"Woman is the homemaker, Ray, and should understand something of homemaking. If she does not, she has failed in her highest mission. So far, you know well that you have not learned much along this line. It is no disgrace to polish stoves and scrub floors, as some people seem to think."

"All of which means—me," she returned, rather peevishly. Then, readjusting herself, she looked into his face, and continued, "Dr. Warren, as you know, I've never attempted to justify myself in this respect. On the contrary, my inability to cope with domestic science has grieved and mortified me beyond expression. But, did it ever occur to you, that it might be a misfortune, rather than a fault?"

"Ray, as a woman you will have to be a housekeeper," he said argumentatively.

"A man may choose his own vocation, Dr. Warren, but a woman, merely because she is a woman, must scrub floors and polish stoves, whether she has any taste for it or not, and, by way of recompense, is told that it is no disgrace."

"But, Ray, I only want to help you. You expect to marry some day. Every girl does. If you are ignorant of these things, you will perpetrate a fraud on the man you marry."

"I'm not willing to admit that as a fact, for there are other things that count as well as scrubbing floors and polishing stoves. I know there is something I can do, and do well. What it is I have not yet learned. But I'm conscious of a latent power that will someday be called into action. Then I'll find my work, and my work will find me. Whether I shall be called to the marriage altar, or the cloister, to the mansion, or to the cabin, I shall be in my proper place, and there will be perfect harmony between my work and myself. If I marry, as I suppose I shall, there will be no fraud perpetrated by me, for I propose to give as much as I receive. But the man I marry will want a companion, and not a servant. He'll have faith in me, and know, that in the hour of trial I'll stand by his side. And, Dr. Warren, that man will be glad to take me as I am, and will never feel that he has been cheated."

## CHAPTER XXIV

## BROTHER ANDREW

"IS Miss Alma West in?" inquired Dr. Warren late that afternoon, as he mounted the steps at the home of Professor Lauder.

"No, Doctor," responded Elbert Odell, who had met him at the door," she has gone to the post-office. Won't you have a seat?"

"No, thank you Elbert, I'll drive down and meet her."

He found her on the next corner, slowly returning, as if her feet were weighted with lead. Immediately he detected that something had gone wrong. He alighted from his buggy to assist her to a seat. Then, taking the seat beside her, he drove from the town into a secluded country road. The girl's hat was drawn down over her face, while her body was convulsed with sobs.

"Dr. Warren," she gained the courage to say, "I sent for you because I was in trouble, and needed your help."

"Then, what can I do for you, Miss Alma?"

With a great effort she gained the mastery of herself, telling him, finally, amid inevitable sobs, that, unfortunately, he had come too late. When she had sent for him, she had just received a letter, informing her of the serious illness of her mother, and she had wanted to borrow sufficient money to take her to her mother's bedside. But in the afternoon mail she had reecived another letter, bringing the grim message of her mother's death. She wanted his counsel as to her next step.

"Miss Alma," said he, after a long silence, "in the presence of such sorrow as yours I realize the futility of words. I'm your friend, and would love to help you. Do you still desire to go?"

"No, Dr. Warren, I shall not go home now."

She related to him her plans, insofar as she had been able to formulate them, and her decisions met the approval of her listener. When the long ride was over, and the horse stopped again in front of Professor Lauder's home, she handed Dr. Warren two letters, saying,

"Read these at your leisure. They will explain conditions at my home. Good-bye. I'll be ready for our ride early in the morning."

On the following morning, true to her promise, he found her waiting at the gate. Her face was pale, and showed marks of tears, but it also showed the end of the conflict, and a victorious outcome. With a brave smile she met and returned his greeting. On turning into the same country road they had travelled the preceding afternoon, he said,

"Miss Alma, who on earth is this Brother Andrew, the writer of those letters? What is a man of such culture doing up there in those mountains?"

"As to who he is I cannot tell. We call him Brother Andrew, the Good Shepherd. The outside world calls him the hermit of Cohutta Mountains. As to what he is doing, that is easily answered. He is ministering to suffering humanity, and giving them a new message. The few preachers, who preceded him into our isolated section all brought one and the same message — that we needed God, which we already knew, and that we needed the outside world, which we already knew. But Brother Andrew's message was different. He said that God needed us, which we didn't know. He told us, that

John, the Baptist, came from just such a section as ours. Then he told us of the mission of John, the Baptist, after which he asked, 'What boy, or girl among you would like to do today what John, the Baptist did two thousand years ago?' That thought has stuck with me ever since. As to Brother Andrew's real name, I haven't the remotest idea. When asked, he always says, 'I'm Andrew, seeking my brother, Peter.' It was he who taught me to read and write, and afterwards made arrangements for my entering school here. Then, after my father's death, he borrowed the money for my board and tuition, making it possible for me to remain in school. And what he has done for me he has done for others all through the mountains of North Georgia and Tennessee. Oh, no, Dr. Warren, Brother Andrew is not an old man — not over thirty, I should judge. He never made any reference to his past life, and I don't know just how long he has been in our section. I saw him for the first time only two years before I left home."

Dr. Warren listened intently to her picturization of this unique character. He appeared deeply affected. At the conclusion of the ride he invited the girl to spend a week with his sister and ward at The Jessamines. In after years Alma West often said,

"I could not have lived through those first few days of of my sorrow, but for my stay at The Jessamines."

## CHAPTER XXV

## THE FEVER EPIDEMIC

THAT year there were no commencement exercises at the Institute. An outbreak of fever necessitated the closing of the school, and the boarding pupils were rushed off to their homes. The fever was of the most virulent type, and the doctors were unable to diagnose it. That it possessed some of the symptoms of yellow fever they all agreed. But, with Sylva an inland town, they had no thought of pronouncing it such.

Nevertheless, that impression got out, producing a panic. By the middle of the second week the physicians were unable to cope with the disease, and the people were dying at an alarming rate. Dr. Warren soon offered his services, and proved of incalculable help to the stricken town.

The disease was confined almost exclusively to the young people — to the boys and girls under twenty years of age. On that account Dr. Warren threw about Reba and Ray every possible protection. But, notwithstanding that fact, Reba went down during the fourth week of the epidemic. Her delicate constitution rendered her an easy prey to the ravages of the disease.

Mrs. Warren became panic-stricken from the first and her alarm unfitted her for a nurse. But, Dr. Warren, leaving Ray by the sick-bed, followed the hysterical woman to the back veranda, and said,

"Mother, unless you pull yourself together, and do your

part of the nursing, there is no chance for Reba. The servants are gone, and Ray can't do all the nursing and other work, as she has been doing for the past two days. Of course, I'm going to drop some of my outside work, and Reba shall have every chance that I can give her."

"If your sister's life means as much to you as you pretend, you will give up all of your outside work. You owe it to me, as well as to her."

But, making no reply, he turned, and walked back to the sick-room, finding Ray slipping from the bed-side with the ice-bag in her hand.

"I think her temperature is falling too fast," she whispered to Dr. Warren.

Nothing with satisfaction Ray's quiet, confident air, he said affectionately,

"Yes, dear, you did right in removing the ice. And you are making a splendid nurse. But you must sleep tonight, and let Mother look after Reba."

During the next two weeks Reba's life hung by a thread, and at times it seemed slipping out over the bar into the great ocean of eternity. At these critical times Mrs. Warren would become frantic, and rush from the room, while Ray, with supernatural strength, would step to the bedside, and, taking the wasted hands into her own, would by sheer will-power seize the drifting life, and draw it back. Again it was her quiet touch that soothed the fever-tossed body.

One night, while watching Ray's wonderful power over his unconscious sister, Dr. Warren said to her,

"Ray, you have found your work, and your work has found you."

"No! Oh, no! Dr. Warren, I do this for love of Reba, and

not for love of the work. Do you think her chances are any better? Is the crisis over?"

"If she lives through tonight, I believe she will get well. There is sure to be a change about midnight, and no knowledge can fortell which way the tide will turn. But, don't let Mother know this. Are you going to sit up the first, or last part of the night?"

"I think I'll sit up all of the night, for I slept two hours this afternoon."

"No, Ray, I positively forbid it. You watch Reba until twelve o'clock, and, if I'm not in by that time, you make Mother relieve you. However, I hope to be back long before midnight. God bless you, child! Don't forget the stimulants."

As Dr. Warren stepped out into the moonlit night, and started on his mission of mercy, he carried with him a picture of Ray Harrison, the fifteen-year-old girl, who, in the moment of need, had stepped forth in the strength and understanding of a woman.

"I do not understand her," he said to himself, and again the proud, girlish voice sounded in his ears, "The man I marry will have faith in me, and I know, that in the hour of trial I'll stand by his side. And that man will take me as I am, and never feel that he has been cheated."

At one o'clock that night Dr. Warren returned, and tiptoed to his sister's bedside.

"Thank God, the crisis is over, and she will live," he whispered.

Thinking Mrs. Warren had gone to the kitchen for something, he [illegible] by Reba's side to give her mother instructions [illegible] for the sleep he so much needed. Noticing t[illegible]er on the other side of the bed, he went over

to fix it. As he did so, he heard a moan at his feet. In the dim light he saw the scourge-stricken form of Ray, half-sitting, half-kneeling — just in the position unconsciousness had given her, as she placed the hot-water bottle at Reba's feet. By her half-opened eyes and crimson cheeks Dr. Warren recognized the handwriting of the fever in its most malignant form. His heart leapt to his throat, and with a feeling of frenzy he lifted the pliant body, carrying it to the back-room.

While he was placing the unconscious form on the bed, her arms encicled his neck, and her fever-parched lips pressed his own, murmuring — "Good-night, Dad."

"Poor little girl, little helpless girl," he said as the tears welled up into his eyes, and a conscious-stricken feeling swept over him.

After removing her slippers, and adjusting the pillows, he crossed the hall to Mrs. Warren's room.

"Reba, my child! Is she worse?" cried the mother, springing up as he entered.

"Be quiet! Your child is all right, and sleeping sweetly. But Ray has taken the fever in its worst form. She's perfectly delirious, and at our mercy, Mother. Will you help me save her?"

"My duty is to my own child, and you can't expect me to neglect Reba."

"Reba has passed the crisis, and will need but little attention, while Ray's life is in the greatest jeopardy." [illegible] accents, though anxious, were low and appealing.

"But, Dr. Warren, I'm worn out from two w[illegible] nursing. However, I'll allow Peachy to come and help yo[illegible]

"PEACHY? Peachy, no doubt, would run the ot[illegible] way."

"No, she has been begging to come ever since Reba was taken, and Mrs. Wilson and Maggie left."

"Then, Mother, why on earth was she not engaged? Why was Ray allowed to work like a slave unnecessarily?"

"Because I didn't want that black negro in my kitchen."

When Dr. Warren realized the cruelty that had been wrought against the girl whom he had promised to protect, his eyes flashed with indignation. On reaching Ray's room with Mrs. Warren he commanded,

"Undress her!" When that was accomplished, he waved her away, saying, "Go! And close the door, so your child will not be disturbed by Ray's moans."

Although Dr. Warren had not slept a wink for thirty-six hours, he assumed the duties of nurse, as well as physician. In Ray's case he knew the fight would be short, but violent. So, with a prayer for strength, he determined to make the effort of his life.

"She must not die! She must not die!" he kept repeating. But she grew worse, and raved for the things of her early childhood. "Dad" and "Mammy Dilsey" each seemed a living presence, on whom she vented a touching mixture of childish wrath and repentant love.

The Jessamines had no place in her diseased brain, only one person accompanying her on her transition from the present to the past, and that one was Bowlegs. The others she left behind as completely as if they had never crossed her path.

The little darkie had been dodging Mrs. Warren, and slipping into the house every night since "de white niggers" left, and had proved of valuable assistance to Ray. When she was stricken, and put to bed, he crept into her room, and sat around like a figure of despair. He never spoke unless

spoken to, but, when he heard Ray call his name, he turned his beaming face to Dr. Warren, and said,

"Dar now!"

At eleven o'clock of the second night's watch Dr. Warren realized with alarm that he was losing hold of himself.

"Bowlegs," he called.

"Yethir." And the boy jumped to his feet from the floor where he had been sleeping.

"Nothing. I was just trying to wake up."

"Want thome coffee?" asked Bowlegs.

"Yes, I certainly would love to have a cup of strong coffee." He had no thought of getting it. A little later he heard the voice of Bowlegs say,

"Here 'tith."

The aroma of coffee diffused itself in the room, and, with an incredulous expression, Dr. Warren turned, and looked on as tempting a cup of coffee as he had ever seen. He drank it with avidity. As he placed the emptied cup in the saucer, and handed it to Bowlegs, he said,

"Thank you, Bowlegs. I never tasted better coffee."

"I make it jeth like sthe tell me," the boy returned, with a gratified grin, pointing toward the bed.

The effect of the strong coffee was instantaneous. Dr. Warren was again alert, taking note of every symptom in his patient. He lifted her into a more comfortable position, and sponged off her hands and face. For the first time her fingers cased to pick at the covering, and her eyes closed in sleep.

Presently he remarked,

"Bowlegs, here's a dollar for you. Now go home, and go to bed. But when you first get there, tell Peachy to come earlier than she did this morning — not to get breakfast, but to stay by Miss Ray, while I take a short nap. She is going to sleep now, and you needn't be afraid."

## CHAPTER XXVI

## DR. WARREN'S LOVE

AS Bowlegs left the room Dr. Warren seated himself by the patient's bed-side. Before he knew it the sleepy feeling re-asserted itself. His eyelids grew heavy, and, in spite of his will, closed.

How long he slept he never knew. In fact, he never believed he slept at all. But as he sat, looking at Ray, her hair became golden, while her eyes turned to the deepest blue, and from the liquid depth of these eyes came that haunting appeal, that had followed him for over fifteen years. He lived again through the long, fateful night of 1865, when, in that very room he had seen for the first and last time the young girl-widow, whose dying eyes had cast their mystic spell over his life.

Over and over again he was forced to witness that night's tragedy. Not only the face and form of Nellie Nultee were before him, but her voice in its sweet, pleading intonations was sounding in his ears, calling, not for the young husband, but for — "Dad! Oh, Dad!"

Dr. Warren tore himself from the nightmare. There before him was the fever-flushed face of Ray Harrison, or Nellie Nultee — he knew not which. Cold drops of perspiration burst out on his brow, as he reached out, catching the extended hands before him — whether of the living or dead he could not discern. But in a soft, caressing voice he urged,

"What is it, little girl?"

"Dad, oh, Dad! Take me home, Dad!"

"You are at home. You are at The Jessamines." His was a tone of infinite sympathy.

"Take me home! They don't want me here! They don't love me here!" And every word seemed to emanate from a broken heart.

Again breaking the shackles of sleep, Dr. Warren pressed the fluttering hands, that he held against his heart, praying,

"Oh, God, does she mean this? Is she conscious of this awful homesickness? Has she found no home in my house? Have I failed utterly to make her happy?"

With a sense of deep self-condemnation, he looked toward her, and said,

"Yes, Ray, they *do* love you, and *do* want you here."

Then, leaning over the suffering one, he threw off the restraint that had bound him, and poured into her unheeding ears as pure, as clean, as sweet a love story as ever came from human heart, or was ever expressed by human lips. Disregarding her fever-clouded mind, he proceeded,

"Yes, dear, they do want you here. They want you so much, that The Jessamines would be unendurable without you. You are its breath, its fragrance, its life. Your presence has beautified it. Your love has sanctioned it. But *yau* are far dearer to me than The Jessamines — than the whole wide world. Can't you hear me? won't you understand me, Ray?" There was a longing communicated, that somehow penetrated the unconscious brain, and seemed to bring quiet to the restless frame. The brown eyes looked at him trustingly, and then closed in sleep.

As he replaced her hand by her side, he noticed with a start its striking resemblance to the hand of Nellie Nultee, and

involuntarily he turned away, as if expecting and dreading to see the well-remembered gold band.

"Have I lost my reason?" he puzzled, furrows again appearing in his brow. "Have I gone crazy, and the resemblance of my ward to that other woman only the fancy of my overstrained mind?" Turning away from the bed, he walked to the window, and threw open the blinds. Again the jessamine-freighted air rushed in, sweeping away the cobwebs from his brain, and leaving it as clear as the atmosphere after the passage of a storm.

"Only imagination," he pronounced with relief, on returning to the bed-side, and looking on the quiet face and dark hair of Ray Harrison. "Only imagination — a fancy brought about by loss of sleep and too vivid memories of that other face — but as different from my little Ray as the cape jessamine from the rich pink rose."

While Dr. Warren stood looking on the perfect face of his ward, trying to convince himself that it bore no resemblance to that of Nellie Nultee, Ray turned in her sleep, and whispered his name. Blushing like a schoolboy, his heart fluttered with the joy of a mature man, a joy hitherto unknown to his thirty-five years of life. But, instead of reveling in his new-found pleasure, Dr. Warren thrust it from him, like a thief whose conscience would not allow him to enjoy his stolen treasure.

"What right have I," he demanded of himself, "to cherish a thought, that makes me traitor to my trust? What right have I to think of love for this child? If I had the power, I dare not awaken her life to the dangerous, intoxicating bliss, that threatens to consume even me. Never by word or deed shall she know anything of my love, until my duties as guardian have been discharged to the last iota. Yes, little Ray,

rather than do myself or you this injustice, I'd consign you to the cold arms of death. But — "Every trace of passion had vanished from his face. "Your guardian is no coward, and he will fight for your life with all the strength of his being."

However, self is the most difficult of foes to conquer, and the conflict left Dr. Warren so exhausted, that he trembled from weakness.

"Oh, if I only had some one to help me nurse this child! someone to watch while I sleep, for sleep I must, or go mad!"

The first streaks of day crept into the darkened room. Turning out the dim lamp he crept to the front veranda, and dropped to a seat on the steps.

"Good morning, Dr. Warren," came from his side, as a hand rested on his shoulder, arousing him from the stupor that had enveloped him.

"Miss Alma, is it really you?" He grasped her hand eagerly.

"Yes, and I should have come sooner, had I known of Reba's sickness. How is she?"

"Reba has passed the crisis, and is doing nicely, but with Ray the worst is yet to come."

"Ray? You don't mean that Ray, too, is down?"

"Yes, she was stricken two days ago, very low from the beginning, and I fear the worst. I've given up my outside practice, and am devoting my entire time to my own sick. But the combined duties of physician and nurse are about to throw me." His face revealed a wan smile.

"Well, I'm here. Give me my orders, and go to bed."

"Miss Alma, you would be risking too much — in fact, your life. I cannot accept the sacrifice, as much as I need you."

"I have counted the cost, and I have come to stay. My

position as governess has been given up, and I'm here for servcie. So, Dr. Warren, you are relieved of the responsibility of accepting, or rejecting me. Even if I knew I'd take the fever, it would not deter me from a duty like this. Last year I might have hesitated before endangering the life that was dedicated to my mother. But now all is changed. So, assign me to my duties, and go to bed."

Alma's voice indicated that further argument was useless.

Two weeks from the day Alma entered The Jessamines Reba and Ray were borne in Dr. Warren's arms to the front veranda for their first outing. That afternoon, as the two invalids sat in large chairs, propped up by pillows, an express package was delivered, directed to them both. When the strings were cut, and the lid removed, two beautiful bouquets of white roses were revealed, and to each was attached a gilt-edged card, bearing the name — ELBERT ODELL.

Dr. Warren took a peculiar interest in the incident. Shortly afterwards he turned to Ray, and inquired.

"Are you ready to go in, now?"

"No, sir, I'm growing better every minute. By night I'll be strong enough to walk." Her face was almost radiant.

"Mr. Odell's gift seems to have produced a beneficial effect." Dr. Warren was almost peevish. For the next half-hour everything Ray said or did met with his disapproval.

To Alma West, who had watched for two weeks his untiring efforts and fatherly devotion to his ward, the guardian's coolness was amazing and inexplicable.

"Have I been mistaken in this man?" she wondered.

Then there was another cutting reply to one of Ray's innocent questions, and Alma saw the child's head fall to the back of her chair in exhaustion, while her frail hands loosed the flowers, that fell limply to her side.

Dr. Warren was clearly alarmed. He sprang to his feet, his face ablaze with the love he thought so well guarded in his heart. Without a word of explanation or a moment's hesitation, he caught her in his arms, and bore her back to her bed.

Fortunately for his secret Alma was the only one who detected it, and it was safe in her keeping, though to herself she pondered.

"Who would have dreamed such a thing? What will be the outcome? Can that child appreciate his love? Can her fun-loving disposition ever respond to the requirements of his strong manhood? Why, indeed, should a man place his destiny in the hands of a child — the white, dimpled hands of a child? But, perhaps, that is the reason they are white and dimpled."

## CHAPTER XXVII

## THE MAN NAMED HIX

MRS. WARREN had yielded to the entreaties of Elbert Odell and Professor English, and agreed to take them as boarders for the coming scholastic year. The day before school opened the young men arrived.

The hilarity and good cheer, that had marked the former school opening, was lacking. Death had claimed its toll from every class. From fifteen the senior class at the Institute was reduced to four—Elbert, Alma, Reba, and Ray. The two latter were far from strong, but insisted on entering school, Dr. Warren yielding under the condition that they ride each way. So, Bowlegs, driving between The Jessamines and the Institute, became a familiar figure. Consciousness of his own importance increased with this stately duty. One morning, as he sat in the buggy waiting for the girls, another negro boy passed by, and called to Bowlegs,

"Whar you gwine, nigger?"

"I'th gwine ter college, dat'th whar I'th gwine." A contemptuous glance was directed at the questioner.

The two young men proved to be exemplary boarders, and the fall and winter passed without discord at The Jessamines. Dr. Warren spent much of his time in Atlanta, co-operating with his lawyer in his effort to establish his rights in The Jessamines. His advertisement had brought forth many letters, but they all contained questions, instead of answers.

However, early in the spring, while he was returning from the post-office along the shaded street to The Jessamines, he read one of a totally different character. It bore a western post-mark, and read as follows:

"Dear Sir:

In replying to your advertisement, please allow me to say, you are looking for one person, at least, who never had an existence. Mrs. George Nultee never had a brother. Her husband, George Nultee, and I were comrades and messmates. On the night preceding the fateful battle we had a long, confidential talk, which is today as clear in my memory as if it had just taken place.

"He told me of his home, The Jessamines, and of his girl-wife, and I remember distinctly he said that she was an only child, and without relative in the world. This impressed me deeply from the fact that I, too, had left a wife similarly situated. As to the baby, he made no reference. And this suggests to my mind the possibility of your being mistaken in that, too. However, be that as it may, I'm sure there was no brother."

The signature bore the name of a stranger. After reading the letter from beginning to end for the second time, Dr. Warren placed it in his pocket. Drawing his hand puzzlingly across his brow, he said,

"But there was a baby, a dark-haired baby girl, that rested against my heart. But, if there was no brother, where is that baby? What has that old negress done with her?" For a moment he pondered silently. Then he reasoned further, "As to the old darkie's interest in the child, I cannot doubt. Oh, I see, her love for the baby prompted her to tell

the falsehood about the brother, in order that she might retain the baby for herself. And this accounts for the mystery surrounding her whereabouts."

On reaching home, and going to his office, Dr. Warren found Ray waiting expectantly for his return with the mail.

"No letter today for Ray," he said cheerfully in an effort to abate her disappointment.

The girl's eyes dropped again to the magazine in her lap.

Taking a seat, and continuing to open the many letters he had received, Dr. Warren was surprised to find one containing the following:

San Francisco, Cal.
March 9, 1880.

Dr. T. J. Warren,

Your advertisement fell into the right hands. I am a cousin, though a distant one, to George Nultee, and, if he left any property, I am the rightful heir, and will demand every penny due me. Let me hear at once, and avoid trouble. Enclosed you will find proofs of my identity. If I fail to hear from you in a reasonable time, I will come and take charge of affairs.

L. L. Hix.

The insulting letter filled Dr. Warren with indignation.

"The puppy! The dirty upstart! I'd rather see The Jessamines in ashes than fall into his hands!" The crushed letter was thrust to the floor.

With astonishment, and a half-uttered inquiry, Ray looked up at him.

"Forgive me, Ray. I forgot you were here," he apologized.

But her silent lips and questioning gaze demanded an explanation, which he realized was due her.

"Ray," he began hesitatingly, "Mother bought this place without a proper investigation of its titles, and her mistake is liable to cost us The Jessamines."

"Cost us The Jessamines? Do you mean that we will have to leave this home, this beautiful home, that I love so much?"

"It seems possible—in fact, probable, for, from the tone of that letter on the floor, I have no hope of compromise."

Then Dr. Warren told Ray of the little babe and his watch by the mother's bed-side in 1865. He explained to her the efforts he had made to find the lost child and the letters he had received in answer to his advertisement. At the close of the talk Dr. Warren requested,

"Ray, I'd like for this whole matter to be kept from Mother and Reba, that is, for the present."

"Very well, Dr. Warren, but please tell me of all you do and all you learn, for The Jessamines means so much to me."

"I certainly will tell you all, and do all within my power to save it."

Ray laid her hand in his, and whispered,

"Thank you."

As Dr. Warren held the hand, that was gradually tightening on his life, he made the silent vow—"She shall have this home, if it cost me, not only the half, but the whole of my all."

## CHAPTER XXVIII

## THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER

THAT spring brought to Reba and Ray their seventeenth and sixteenth birthdays simultaneously, and with their coming was bestowed a rare, costly gift, the gift of womanhood. Reba was tall and slender, with the grace and delicate sweetness of the lily. Ray, though a year younger than her friend, was far below the average in size, with her figure perfectly developed and possessing the lightness of motion, that had characterized her early childhood. With Reba the transition was gradual and hardly perceptible, but Ray, a typical daughter of the South, was yesterday a child, today a woman.

And the two girls, as different in disposition as appearance, had lived in the closest intimacy for three years, without a break in their friendship, such a thing as disfavor one for the other finding no lodgment in either breast. Ray would frequently stand by the piano, and turn Reba's music with genuine pride, while Reba would watch Ray's hands move over the strings of her mandolin, listening with delight to her sweet, simple melodies.

It happened that Alma West was visiting at The Jessamines on this day of days, and at dusk, while Dr. Warren was escorting her to the gate, after the passing of a "perfect day," he ventured,

"Miss Alma, I've a request to make of you."

"Of me, Dr. Warren?"

"Yes, and I want you to view it most sensibly. Will you?"

"I'll try."

"Well. Our appreciation of your work at The Jessamines during the recent epidemic is unbounded. So, as a token of our gratitude, I want to provide your commencement dress. Now, don't let any foolish sentiment rob me of such a pleasure. My mother and I have decided to have Madame LeCroix, a French modiste, sent out by a New Orleans firm, to furnish the costumes of Reba and Ray, and I want you to give her an order for yours also. I won't allow the girls to appear in these clothes, unless you, also, have an equally attractive dress. So, you have it in your power to deprive them of a very great pleasure."

Alma looked puzzled for a moment, appearing to be caught between the proverbial "devil and the deep-blue sea." Presently she said a little nervously,

"Very well, then, Dr. Warren, I'll accept, and I'm very, very grateful."

A little later Dr. Warren hurried up to his room to make the necessary preparations for supper. The breath of the jessamines had permeated the room. He could spare a few moments, so he took a seat by the window, and looked down on the flowers below. They had just reached their spring perfection.

Almost instantaneously he beheld, in the yard, the dim outlines of two approaching figures, apparently a man and a woman. Then he heard from beneath,

"Yes, Ray, I know we are too young to marry yet, but I cannot leave without the promise."

"Elbert, I simply will not agree to a clandestine engagement. Go to Dr. Warren, and make an open confession of

your love. Obtain his consent, and you have nothing to fear."

Rising from his seat, Dr. Warren crossed the room, and fell on his bed. Declining the call to supper, he buried his face in the pillows, a prey to the torturing pangs of jealousy.

The next morning his pale face and haggard looks were apparent to all. With a gentle solicitude, Ray followed him to the front veranda, and asked,

"Is there anything I can do for you?"

"No!" was his impatient rejoinder. "You have done too much already!" Like a goaded animal, he rushed from her, leaving her wondering at his strange behavior. He was passing quickly down the path, leading to the gate, when he turned, and called,

"Tell Mother I'm off for Atlanta. Must catch the early train. Don't know how long I'll be gone."

For two days the unhappy man wandered aimlessly over the streets of Atlanta, trying to school himself to the inevitable, while all of the time his aching heart, growing more and more rebellious, urged him to return, and make a fight for the coveted prize. But honor and duty cried out against this course. Finally a compromise was effected. He resolved to make no mention of his own love, but to withhold his consent, and, if necessary, exercise his authority in forbidding her engagement to Elbert for a year, or until she had finished school at Whitfield College.

With a much lighter heart and a feeling of resentment toward himself for not reaching this decision earlier, he left on the first train for Sylva.

On stepping from the platform at Sylva late that afternoon, he almost ran into Elbert Odell, who extended his hand, and said,

"Glad to see you back, Dr. Warren. We've missed you awfully at The Jessamines."

Dr. Warren forced himself to look into the fine boyish face, that confronted him.

"I'm glad to be back, Elbert." But there was an inevitable scowl on his face.

"Dr. Warren," Elbert then said, showing indecision, "I want to speak to you on a subject of great importance—that is, to me. It's a subject involving my life's happiness. Of course, you know of our love, and I want you to consent to our engagement. I know she's rather young, but many girls are married at sixteen, and she's seventeen."

"You are mistaken. She's barely sixteen." Dr. Warren was caustic. "And she'll be in school for another year, at least. For that length of time I want the subject of love and marriage left entirely alone."

"But, Dr. Warren, I simply worship her. How could I have lived in the same house with her, and not love her? I have no thought of an immediate marriage. In fact, my mother and I expect to go abroad soon, and I tell you candidly, that I'm not willing to put the Atlantic between us, without having this matter settled."

His earnest, frank appeal and manly bearing forced Dr. Warren to admit, he knew no one more worthy of a young girl's love. Conquering his rebellious heart, he said,

"I'll have to talk with her. Afterwards, I'll give you another interview." He smiled almost grimly.

"Thank you, Dr. Warren. But remember, it is only two weeks to commencement." Lifting his hat, Eelbert turned, and walked away.

Dr. Warren, on reaching home, found Ray seated on a small box in the yard, surrounded by fowls of every

description. Rising to greet him, as if his parting thrust had been entirely forgotten, she persuaded,

"Come, and see our little ducks." She led him to the back lot. Then, "Aren't they darling?" She caught one of the goslings, and pressed it to her cheek.

Suddenly a commotion in the pasture beyond burst upon them, as if a herd of cattle had been stampeded. Looking through the tall growth of weeds, they beheld Bowlegs coming at break-neck speed, his big eyes shining like glistening, white china, and calling at the top of his voice,

"Mith Ray! Oh, Mith Ray! Come 'ere quick, Mith Ray! Billie Boy an' Charmin' Billie ith bof got pigth! Billie Boy ith got free, an' Charmin' Billie ith got a hunderd!"

## CHAPTER XXIX

### "MARRIAGE? MARRIAGE?"

SEARCH as he might, Dr. Warren failed to find a just reason for opposing the engagement. The following morning was Sunday, and, when Mrs. Warren and Reba had left for church, leaving Ray indisposed in her room, Dr. Warren entered the library. After a long, mental conflict, he said aloud,

"I must admit Elbert is the cleanest chap I know. His family standing would give her a social position second to none. What better could I ask for the child, whose welfare I have assumed, and whose happiness must be secured, regardless of my own? But, I must send for her, and have it over before my courage deserts me."

His summoning was unnecessary. Ray stood in the doorway.

"I didn't know you were here. I thought you were at church. I came to bring this vase," were her halting sentences, as she manifested surprise in manner and words.

Clad in loose attire and carpet slippers, her hair falling in disarray over her shoulders, with the silver urn in her uplifted hand, Ray might easily have typified the cup-bearer of the gods. Hebe, in her youthful beauty, never possessed more of young maidenhood's charms than were embodied in the blushing face and graceful form of Dr. Warren's ward.

"Please be seated, Ray. I've something to say to you."

"And I, Dr. Warren, wish to have a talk with you. I must have a reason for your withholding the—"

"Ray, why try to settle this momentous question now? Why not wait another year at least? Your welfare is very dear to me, and, for my sake, as well as your own, I ask you to defer the question of marriage for one more year."

"Marriage? Marriage? What do you mean, Dr. Warren? I have no thought of marriage—no more than . . . than . . . you have."

His eyes and hers met in a long, questioning reproach, but neither quaked before the accusation of the other.

"Ray Harrison, you have never told me a falsehood before."

"If I've done so now, it's unintentional. I will compromise by saying, there may be buried somewhere in my being a thought of marriage, but I've given it so little thought, that I was for the time unconscious of its existence."

"Then, Ray, will you please tell me why you encouraged a man's love, when you had no thought of marriage?"

"I never did. On the contrary, I discouraged it by both word and act. As for marrying him, I could not contemplate such a thing any more than I could think of marrying my brother, or . . . you."

Dr. Warren's face turned near to ghastly, but he never flinched from the blow. He nerved himself for the occasion, and asked,

"Then why did you send him to me? Why did you send him for my consent, if you had no intention of keeping faith with him?"

"I did not. I told him it was useless to speak to you on the subject, for, under no consideration, would I become engaged to him. If he has appealed to you, he did it over my protest, and he's no longer entitled to the friendship I've given him."

"Stop, Ray! Stop! I heard you tell him to get my consent to the engagement, and that he would have nothing to fear." The veins in Dr. Warren's temples were swelling, as if about to burst.

"Dr. Warren, what's the matter? Of whom are you talking?" Ray rose from her seat.

"I speak of your lover, Elbert Odell. Deny the charge, if you dare! Convince me that I did not hear this, and I'm willing to admit, that I'm not only crazy, but a grovelling idiot."

Like moonbeams struggling through shadows, a dim light appeared in her face. Then a peal of laughter broke the tension, as Ray remarked,

" 'There are none so blind as those who will not see.' It is not myself, but Reba, whom he loves, and wants to marry." With added peals of laughter, she ran from the room, leaving Dr. Warren in amazed chagrin.

But he was now quite glad to admit his absurd mistake, since the weight had been lifted from his heart. Restored faith in the girl he loved was as sweet as the perfume of the jessamines, while the thought of her untrammeled affections quickened every pulsation.

"So you thought someone wanted to take me off your hands," tempted Ray a half-hour later.

Aroused from his happy trance, he returned,

"And now I know it. But may I ask the name of your would-be husband?" There was an inquisitive twinkle in his eye, as he looked toward her splendidly attired form.

She merely returned a twinkle, saying nothing.

"I'll relieve you of your embarrassment," continued Dr. Warren, "for I now understand why Professor English

has been avoiding me of late. Poor fellow! He certainly has my sympathy."

"Elbert sought your society, and Professor English avoided it for the same reason. But it has been so long since you were young, that you've forgotten all of love's symptoms. However, there's no harm done to anybody but me, and I'll forgive you with the proviso, that you grant my request."

"I'm willing to give anything you ask for, even to the half of my kingdom."

"It's not your kingdom, but your confidence I crave. I've been in your care for three years, and have accepted food and raiment at your hands with the unconcern of a child. If I have no money, it's doubly wrong to keep me in ignorance of the fact. If I must work for my living, I should be fortified and equipped, and not be thrust into the business world unprepared. Whatever my condition, there is no just reason for withholding the truth. So, Dr. Warren, I ask again for the facts. Have I sufficient means to live according to my present position, or shall I have to work for my living?"

Hearing the buggy at the gate, and with no time to parry words before Reba and her mother would be in the house, he answered,

"It will never be necessary for you to work for your living. This I would have told you long ago, and relieved you of doubts, had I known they existed."

"Well, I'm indeed grateful, Dr. Warren. A great burden has been removed from my life." Her smile showed her gratitude, and did much toward relieving him of contrition for his evasion of the truth.

## CHAPTER XXX

## REBA'S LOVE DREAM

THAT afternoon, while the inmates of The Jessamines were supposed to be indulging in their usual Sunday siesta, Reba was in her room, but not sleeping. Nevertheless, she was dreaming—dreaming her first glorious day-dream of love—it had crept into her life—this thing of love—as gently and imperceptibly as the coloring into the cheek of the peach. And from this love there emanated a rare, intangible beauty.

"Little sister," said Dr. Warren, having come to learn more of her affair with Odell, "have you so soon learned the great passion of love?"

"Yes," she whispered, drawing her brother to a seat on the window-ledge by her side. "I'm not sure when I began to love Elbert, but it must have been when I saw him first."

With inexpressible tenderness he drew her head to his shoulder, and was in the act of confiding to her his own secret, when a pink dress fluttered by the doorway, and the secret was withheld.

"What does Mother say about it?" he finally asked.

"I have not told her yet. Ray, alone, knows about it."

"And what does Ray think?"

"She advised me to tell you of our love, and to gain your consent before I gave my promise. And, really, Brother, I did try to tell you, but you would not have understood, and that made it so hard. Elbert thinks you disapprove,

thinks you dislike him, though I know he's mistaken. You can't help but like him, can you?"

Kissing her brow, he replied,

"You think Elbert irresistible, do you?"

"Quite, Brother."

"Well, I must say, if I have to lose you, there is no one to whom I had rather give you. But, Reba, there must be no thought of marriage for a good while yet. I have fully resolved that you and Ray must spend next year in Whitfield College. Then, if all goes well, we'll take a holiday."

The next morning Elbert left Dr. Warren's office with a beaming smile, and for the following two weeks it never left him.

"Mother," said Dr. Warren, after the young people had gone to school, "I learned yesterday that Reba had not informed you of hers and Elbert's interest in each other."

"It was not necessary, for I've known it all the time."

"Then, what do you think of it? Do you consent to their engagement?"

"If I objected, I should have done so long ago. Elbert has twenty, or twenty-five thousand dollars in his own name, and I don't know that Reba can ever do any better."

"But, Mother, I hope you agree with me, that their marriage must be put off for at least two years?"

"I'm not so sure of that. I see no reason why they should wait so long. You know many girls are married even at sixteen."

"Yes, and dead at seventeen. I will not allow Reba to marry before she is eighteen, and that is a year off. She must enter Whitfield College next fall. About that I am determined."

## CHAPTER- XXXI

## PAUL ODELL HAS AN EXPERIENCE

WEDNESDAY, the long-looked-for graduating day at Sylva Institute, arrived in due season. It was an ideally beautiful June day, and, as a consequence, every seat in the chapel was occupied. The white-vested ushers had performed their duties, and taken their stand at the doors.

The dignified Professor Lauder, a slim, wiry man, of typical professorial demeanor, stepped to the center of the stage, following the rising of the curtain, and apologized for the unavoidable delay, that had retarded the opening exercises. As he left the stage at the right, Elbert Odell, followed by the three senior girls, entered from the left.

The girls were clothed in costumes of exceeding beauty, Ray and Reba being clad in material of airy lightness, with every detail bespeaking the "sweet girl graduate." Alma wore different attire. Her form, as well as her mind, had attained a maturity far beyond her years, and Madame Lecroix, recognizing her opportunity, had seized it for a grand display of her wares.

The magnificent figure of the mountain girl, in accordance with the fashion of the day, was clothed in rich, creamy satin. Her long slender neck was covered by a collar of rare old lace, held in place by a ruby brooch, her one heritage from a Colonial ancestress, the value of which was as far above her comprehension as was the remainder of her costume. And her ignorance of monetary value enabled her to wear the expensive attire with the ease and unconcern of an empress.

Her abundant blue-black hair was arranged in a graceful coil, and rested like a coronet above her broad brow. There was no color in her smooth olive cheeks, but her thin lips were as rich and her dark eyes as lustrous as the jewel at her throat. With poise and dignified bearing she stepped to the center of the stage to deliver her salutatory address.

For four years Alma West had walked among the people of Sylva, without evoking enough interest to even call forth a disparaging remark. Now, as she appeared before them for the last time, they looked and listened spellbound. Coupled with their amazement was a sense of resentment. Somehow, they felt they had been duped and defrauded. They realized the charcoal had turned to a diamond, and had received its polish, not through them, but in spite of them, while, now, owing to their failure to see it in the rough, it would sparkle and shed its beauty for other eyes than theirs.

After the usual greeting, Alma turned to her real theme, "For What Do We Live?" Her plea for loftier standards, for nobler ideals, was as different from that of the ordinary school girl, composition as she, herself, to the ordinary schoolgirl. Her thoughts were clothed in true eloquence, but the eloquence of nature, not of art. Her hearers sensed a wholesome aroma, not of the hothouse, but of the forest. Passing by the flower garden, with its delicate plants and artificial fountains, she drew her similes from the mountains, with their rugged peaks and dashing cataracts.

Ere long the audience had forgotten its petty grievance, and yielded so completely to her influence, that Dr. Warren and his companion, Paul Odell, the chosen orator of the day, slipped in unobserved, and into their seats, reserved for them in front of the stage.

In the voice and face of Alma West Paul Odell immediately recognized something quite familiar.

"The mother as she bends over the cradle of her boy," she was saying, "feels she is living for something. My friends, for what do you live?" And her eyes looked directly into those of the newcomer.

The rich red blood leapt in her veins, but by the time it reached her cheeks, tingeing them with its rare glow, she was scanning the faces in the rear of the auditorium, and no one knew that anything unusual had occurred. But the unsophisticated mountain girl realized, that, in an instant's time, a partition-wall had sprung up, dividing her past from her future. She made no pretense at ignorance, but recognized the love-call, that had knocked at her heart.

During the remainder of her appeal, she kept her head well elevated, looking no more to the front seat, until the closing sentence was reached. Then, as if ferreting out the secrets of his soul, she again looked steadfastly into the eyes of Paul Odell.

"Who is she?" inquired the young minister of Dr. Warren, as Alma took her seat.

Knowing the thunderous applause would drown his voice, Dr. Warren pointed to the open program in his companion's hand. At the top of the page was printed, "Miss Alma West—Murray County."

" 'Tootley, the child of Joe and Mirandy West! I've been listening to the voice of the mother, and beholding the face of the father. How strange that this goddess, Diana, this Madame DeStael, should be that mountain girl!"

Seeing no other than the face of Alma, and hearing no voice but hers, the remainder of the program was a blank to the distinguished visitor. Reba's essay, Elbert's declamation, and

Ray's valedictory were all powerless to break the spell. Finally, he realized that Dr. Warren was on the stage. But not till he heard him say, "I present to you the Reverend Paul Odell," did he take in the situation.

Even then he was only partially aroused, making his way to the stage like a somnambulist. With an uncertain, hesitating voice, he stammered into his address, his face flushed with embarrassment, his hands searching for his pockets like a frightened schoolboy, saying his first speech.

The graduating class had left the stage, and taken seats in front. Like the remainder of the audience, they were wondering at the peculiar behavior of the noted speaker. Mrs. Odell's face was crimson with embarrassment, as her son floundered around, like one in a dream.

But, just when the tension was at its highest, Paul, with one supreme effort, clipped the cords that bound him, and thrust aside the embarrassment like an ill-fitting garment. He then stepped forth in perfect ease. It required only a moment to regain his lost ground, and to catch the attention of the crowd. With the combined power of the lawyer and the minister, he swayed the large audience as one person. They listened to his clear logic, his brilliant metaphors, and his deep, soul-stirring appeals in awe and admiration.

And never had the young preacher soared to such sublime heights. He seemed to shake off the shackles of earth, and to mount on the wings of spiritual eloquence into an ethereal realm beyond the reach of mortal beings. It was another crisis in the life of Paul Odell. The man and the superman had met. The man surrendered the body, while the superman took possession, vesting it with divinity. As to what he said, that is now a matter of history. As to how he said it, only eternity can explain.

## CHAPTER XXXII

## THE SCREECH-OWL

THAT day Paul Odell and his mother were guests at The Jessamines. Soon after dinner Dr. Warren and the young minister found themselves seated alone on the front veranda. Without any preliminaries, the latter suddenly inquired,

"Dr. Warren, will you please tell me something of this Alma West? Are her parents living? Is she is in the care of anyone? What is her past? What are her plans for the future?"

"Her past is an open book in which all may read. Her parents were unlearned mountaineers with one ambition — to educate their only daughter. They are now both dead. As to her future, she expects to teach school."

"But, Dr., Warren, is she alone? Is there no one who—?"

"Mr. Odell, Alma is the dearest friend of my sister and my ward. To some extent I feel as if I were her guardian."

To Dr. Warren's look of inquiry Odell replied,

"While my interest may seem premature, it is nevertheless genuine."

"I just couldn't exactly understand your extraordinary interest in our friend from Murray County, you having been accustomed to the society of women of much higher social standing."

"I've seen many fascinating women, Dr. Warren, but I've never been impressed as I was by Miss West this morning. I think, yes. . . . I *know* I love her, and, if I can get her, she is

going to be my wife. Now you understand my motive in asking impertinent questions."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Dr. Warren, just as the remainder of the party, including Alma, came onto the veranda.

Mrs. Odell and Mrs. Warren took seats at one end of the broad porch, and began talking of their respective plans for the summer.

"Dr. Warren and I have about decided to take the girls to the sea-coast for their vacation," said Mrs. Warren.

"Well, well, I've a nice cottage at Tybee, and you are more than welcome to it. I've promised to spend the summer with my sister in North Carolina. However, Elbert will be at the cottage, and he would be delighted to have you. Paul, too, will probably be at home part of the summer for his vacation."

"Thank you very much, Mrs. Odell." Mrs. Warren was manifestly delighted. "If nothing unforseen occurs, we'll gladly accept the use of your cottage."

As if by prearrangement, the three couples of young people had paired off, and occupied different sections of the shaded front yard. Elbert and Reba were seated on the grass at the base of a large tree. Dr. Warren and Ray occupied a rustic bench on the opposite side of the yard. Mr. Odell and Alma, after walking about aimlessly for awhile, had stopped at the end of the walk, and were leaning on the double iron gates, confronting each other. After a few labored remarks Paul said,

"Miss Alma, it may strike you as premature, but we can only be together for a short time, and I wish to talk to you on a subject of great interest to me, and I hope it will be of equal interest to you."

"Mr. Odell, we can have no interest in common. For a

few pleasant hours our paths have run parallel, but henceforth they will diverge as far as the east is from the west. I have my work, and you have yours. I do not pretend to be ignorant of the subject to which you allude, and, if I were situated as other girls, I'm candid to admit, that, it would be a—pleasant theme to me. But, there are barriers that hedge me in, and. . ."

"Alma West, God intended you for my wife, and barriers must be surmounted. There is only one barrier to my determination to have you, and, that is, for you to convince me of your indifference. Can you look into my face, and say, 'Paul Odell, you mean nothing to me, and my life will go on as if you had never crossed my path'?"

With an exultant laugh, he saw her cheeks turn red, and her eyes fall before his challenge.

"I knew it. I knew it. God never does his work by halves. So, my priestess of Cohutta, when shall we be married?"

"Mr. Odell, marriage is out of the question for me. I'm indebted to a stranger for the money, that enabled me to obtain my education, and that money must be repaid. I expect to teach school, until every cent is made, and I can go in person to my benefactor, and thank him for his kindness. No, certainly not — I shall not allow you, or anyone else to help me now, I covet the privilege of earning it myself, and to do so will require at least two years. So, please don't speak of marriage, until my debt has been paid."

Odell realized that argument would be useless, and, by intuition, he knew that it was not the time for him to inform her as to the identity of her benefactor. And, since he could not deter her from her purpose, his active brain began formulating plans to facilitate her progress in money-making. He

thought of a girl's school in South Georgia, of which he was a trustee. Telling her of this, he pressed her for a promise to marry him, when the debt should have been settled.

"I do not believe in long engagements, and prefer not to give my promise. So, Mr. Odell, I ask you not to press the matter any further just yet. I admit my interest in you, but I'm doubtful about ever becoming your wife. My place is in Cohutta Mountains. My work is there. My people are there."

"Alma," he said, with concentrated tenderness, as the girl, woman-like, dashed the tears from her eyes, "quit struggling. Abandon yourself to the waves. They'll carry you to the shore in safety."

"Mr. Odell, I cannot float with the tide, as others do. My landing will have to be made against the tide. But I'll make it in safety, even through the breakers and over a rock-rimmed coast."

"Did it ever occur to you, that the harbor of your desires might be reached by some other landing than the one you have chosen, and that the trip might be facilitated by the adoption of sails, instead of oars? Again I say, we must take the trip of life together. God intended it. You need not smile. Yes—I'm a Presbyterian, and believe in predestination, the predestination of our marriage. When will you give the promise?"

She was relieved of an answer by the arrival of several handsome carriages.

Dr. Warren and Ray advanced to the front gate.

"Dr. Warren," cried Sylva's smiling mayor, a ruddy, fat little man of superb jollity, as he stepped from the first conveyance, "we cannot allow you to monopolize our distinguished visitor."

"No, indeed," said his companion, likewise smiling, but

less naturally than the mayor, "We have called en masse to protest."

"I know this feast was intended for Mr. Odell," said Dr. Warren, leading the way to the house, "but I shall hang around the edges, and appropriate the crumbs that fall from his table."

"You are not entitled even to the crumbs from the way you have ignored us for the past three years," ventured one of the young ladies, "but, if you will allow us to sit here on this fine grass, instead of herding us into a room, we'll forgive the past."

"Certainly. There is no 'Keep Off The Grass' here. Make yourselves at home in any way you choose. Here is the best shade." He led the way to one of the largest oaks in the yard.

The grown-ups were becoming as noisy as a crowd of children at their first spring picnic. The visitors being former schoolmates of Paul Odell at Sylva Institute, talk came easy.

While their conversation was at its most pronouncedly boisterous stage Dr. Warren, followed by the three young girl-graduates, slipped into the house. As they disappeared, one of the visitors remarked,

"Those are unusually striking girls. Ray Harrison is a beauty."

"I consider the other one far prettier, don't you, Paul?" prompted Lula McIntyre, a dark-eyed young lady, and former favorite of Paul's.

"The other one? To which 'other one' do you refer, Lula?"

"To the slender blonde, the Warren child, of course. You surely wouldn't call that gawky mountaineer pretty?"

"No," looking squarely into her eyes, "'pretty' could not be applied to Alma West."

The young lady, coloring under his reproachful look, exclaimed,

"Aren't you surprised at Dr. Warren's allowing his sister and ward to make a companion of such a girl?"

"'Of such a girl'? You forget that she is a stranger to me. What is her crime? What is it that unfits her for the association of other girls of her age?"

"Oh, Paul, come down from your perch. I've said nothing about crime. But you know, even if you have become a great divine, that there are social lines that one obliterates at his peril."

"Lula, I've heard much of this business of caste, but in what it really consists I know not. Bigotry, conceit, and cruelty strike me as being its greatest components. The woman, who is brave enough to ignore its unjust rules, and disregard its cruel mandates, is the woman who challenges my admiration, and she it is who merits the commendation of the age. By what code of rules can we take three young girls, all equally endowed and bearing the same seal of purity, and eulogise two of them, while we ostracise the third?"

Dr. Warren and the three girls returned, bearing trays of luscious watermelon, the first of the season. As the forks plunged into the hearts of the red fruit, the conversation merged into lighter vein, and into which Alma West and her friends were drawn. Paul's indirect lecture had turned the tide in the mountain girl's favor, and each of the visitors, with one exception, had something pleasing to say to her, some few commenting favorably upon her address of the morning. But the instigator of the lecture, the petted beauty of the town, ignored her as before.

The attitude of Lula McIntyre toward Alma West had evidently turned from indifference to hostility as the conversation progressed. A little later, as Paul assisted her to her phaeton and the party drove off, she called to Alma, saying, with intense sarcasm,

"Miss West, you must not disappoint us tonight, for our drama would be a failure without you. Your part is *so* important."

That evening a popular play of the time was presented by the local talent, and Lula McIntyre as the heroine displayed unusual ability. The party from The Jessamines arrived a little late, and the first scene was well on its way. Paul and Alma were conducted to seats near the front, and immediately they looked up, meeting the malignant black eyes of the leading lady.

"Isn't she beautiful?" whispered Alma to her companion, who replied,

"Yes, as beautiful as a Bengal tigress."

"By the way," he continued, as the first curtain dropped, "what did she mean this afternoon by her reference to your part? You are not in the play, are you?"

"No, but I'm behind the scenes in the next act," she answered softly, showing that the parting thrust of the jealous beauty had found no lodgment with her.

Shortly afterwards she slipped from his side, and disappeared through a side stage door. The audience was looking on a starless nocturnal scene, which was presently made thrillingly realistic by the weird cry of the screech-owl.

As the audience looked with wonder and amazement, a second call of the owl sounded, at which the listeners burst forth in a wild applause.

All, with one exception, thought they were listening to a

real screech-owl. But, "You jes' oughtter hear 'Tootley. She kin beat me all holler," reminded Paul Odell of another setting. And the next instant he was again standing on the banks of the mountain stream, every detail as clearly defined, as if only three days, instead of three years, had intervened since he saw it last.

"A penny for your thoughts," was Alma's reminder of her presence by his side.

"It would take far more than a penny to buy my thoughts."

## CHAPTER XXXIII

## AUNT LYDIA

THE Warren family, with Alma West, hurried off to Tybee Island as soon as possible after commencement. They occupied the Odell cottage, which was located on a little eminence, and offered an excellent view of the Atlantic.

The season was marked by an unprecedented reign of gayety, Dr. Warren and his group infusing the up-country energy, and adding deeper zest to every pleasure. For the first time in her life Alma West threw off her serious attitude, and became a girl among girls. Ray, with her characteristic enthusiasm, was in the foremost rank of every undertaking. Reba's pleasant manner and doll-like appearance won the admiration of all, but the open secret of her engagement and Elbert's constant attention separated her, in a way, from her associates.

Dr. Warren looked upon the three young girls in his care with genuine pride, delighting in their happiness. During the latter part of their stay they were joined by Paul Odell, who enjoyed his vacation as never before. On the morning after his arrival a brilliant ruby ring sparkled on Alma's finger.

The last day of August found the Warren party in the railroad station at Savannah, awaiting their different trains. Alma was last to leave, but she had only a few hours to ride before reaching the little village, where she was to teach.

On arriving she found everything agreeably arranged.

As to her age and former experience she was asked no questions. She at once realized that her path had been cleared, and her woman's intuition whispered, "Paul Odell."

"But," she said to herself, "he shall see that I'm worthy of his confidence. I shall fill, as well as occupy, the principal place in this school. And the patrons will be ready to acknowledge at the expiration of this scholastic year, that I've earned the splendid salary they've agreed to pay me."

She began her new life with an energy that astonished the little, sleepy town. At her very entrance the old schoolhouse was permeated by a quickening atmosphere, that infused new life into the pupils, filling them with an evident desire for achievement. And, before the parents realized a change was in process, they were confronted by a new order of things. The cocoon of custom was being forced, to free in the following spring, the butterfly of thought, that should soar far beyond the traditional lines, and fill the parents, as well as their offspring, with wonder and delight.

Soon after their arrival at The Jessamines, Dr. Warren announced, hesitatingly.

"Mother, I've just received a letter from my old aunt in California. She's coming East this fall, and I'd like for her to visit us."

"Your Aunt Lydia, the oil-magnate's widow?" inquired Mrs. Warren, eagerly.

"Yes, and she is a lovable old lady. I'm sure you would like her."

"Certainly you must invite her. We must have her by all means."

Dr. Warren turned away, and entered his office. Soon Ray appeared, and asked,

"Dr. Warren, have you learned nothing of the man,

Hix, the man who thinks he has some rights to The Jessamines?"

"No. He seems to have disappeared as completely as the Nultee baby. But he'll appear on the scene at some inopportune moment, so I've left no stone unturned to find someone with a superior claim and a little more considerate of our own rights. I've had every register in the state examined, hoping to find a record of the Nultee marriage, but this, too, has proved futile."

"But, Dr. Warren, it proves that they were not married in Georgia, does it not?"

"No. I cannot claim even that satisfaction. Many of the public buildings, with their legal records, were destroyed by Sherman's army, and I'm forced to admit the possibility of this particular document having gone up in smoke. Of course, this entire mystery would have been impossible but for the war and the chaotic condition incident to war."

"But, Dr. Warren, can you afford to go to New York, and leave The Jessamines in jeopardy?"

"Yes, Ray, I'm compelled to return to my business in the North. But The Jessamines is in no immediate danger, and you need not give yourself any anxiety about it. Its interests will be as safely guarded as if I were present. Now, you must hurry up, and make your preparations for entering Whitfield. I must see you and Reba properly installed before I can leave."

## CHAPTER XXXIV

## OFF TO COLLEGE

JUST one week before Reba and Ray left for college the sweet-faced Aunt Lydia arrived at The Jessamines. During that short period, however, she became fully established in the affections of the girls.

The old lady was as dainty and fragile as a piece of Dresden china. She was habitually clothed in soft, black silk, and over her snowy white hair was invariably worn an artistic lace cap.

Without a discordant ripple she found her place in the home life, her presence never creating the slightest jar to even the keenest sensibilities.

"Mrs. Warren," she ventured one day, "I could not help loving your beautiful daughter, for she is the exact image of her brother, and Thaddeus has always been my favorite nephew."

"Yes, and Reba is just as much like Dr. Warren in character as in features," replied the mother, pleasantly.

"Then she is doubly lovely, for, to my mind, he is as fine a character as the world has ever produced."

On the morning before her departure Ray ran into Aunt Lydia's room, and, holding out a single cape jessamine blossom, said,

"This is the last summer bloom, and I got it for you. Isn't it lovely? But it is not fully open yet. Tomorrow it will be more beautiful, and will have a sweeter fragrance."

Instead of taking the flower, Aunt Lydia arose, and placed

a soft, white hand on each of Ray's cheeks. Looking intently into her eyes she responded.

"Yes, it is indeed lovely, and I hope it is typical of your own young life — not fully developed, but giving promise of greater beauty and sweeter fragrance. But that life must be as carefully handled as this blossom, or it can never attain a perfect tomorrow."

Placing the cape jessamine in Aunt Lydia's hand, Ray said, "I understand," and ran from the room.

That afternoon Dr. Warren and his aunt were alone, when he suddenly asked,

"What do you think of my ward, Aunt Lydia?"

"There is something wonderfully magnetic about her," answered the old lady, "and, yet, I must confess I do not quite understand her. She attracts me as no other girl has ever done before, but as to what it is that draws me so strangely I do not know. Is it the guileless innocence of a child, or the subtle power of a woman? She seems as artless as a babe, but, occasionally, even while her lips are wording some simple, childish thought, a vague, mystic light gleams in her eyes, that appears to mock me with the accumulated wisdom of ages. So, Thaddeus, this feeling of uncertainty worries me, and I appeal to you to tell me what it all means."

"Aunt Lydia," he began, "Ray Harrison has been in my home for three and one-half years, and I've watched and studied her closely, but I've never found the slightest deceit about her. Yet, like yourself, I often have a feeling of her double personality, but, believe me, it is not duplicity. It is merely a quality of child and woman, of youth and age, of simplicity and wisdom — of all of which she is totally unconscious. It is true that I do not understand her, for she always evades me just when I think I'm about to lay hold of the mystery.

But, Aunt Lydia, it is not Ray's fault that we cannot read the page." Dr. Warren's tone was slightly apologetic, but there was an undercurrent of profound sympathy. This Aunt Lydia caught, and threw her arms around him, saying,

"My dear boy, you need not plead for your little girl-love. My faith in her is absolute, and I was only testing you. Yes, I've discovered your secret, but it is safe with me."

The next day Dr. Warren took his sister and ward to the nearby city of Mooreville, and, after selecting for them their room in Whitfield College, he looked into their tearful eyes, and with his own voice showing emotion said,

"Good-bye, till next summer."

## CHAPTER XXXV

## HALLOWE'EN AT WHITFIELD

REBA entered her college life as naturally as if she had been accustomed to it for years. But the strict rules were galling to Ray, who, had it not been for Reba's restraining hand, would have rebelled. However, at best there were many irregularities in Ray's conduct, but her bright face and splendid lessons winning for her the favor of the president, caused these to be excused and overlooked.

The first two months had passed and brought them to the last day in October, which, incidentally, had proven a most trying day to Ray. That evening the entire school was ordered from the dining-room to assemble in the chapel.

"Young ladies," reminded one of the professors, advancing to the front of the platform, as they entered and took their seats, "I have been requested to inform you, that there must be none of the foolishness to which young people sometimes resort on Halloween night. I trust it is not necessary for me to tell you, that such things are for ruffians, and not for young ladies of Whitfield College. Furthermore, I will tell you, that the halls will be guarded, and that anyone attempting to leave her room will be reported, and the penalty — expulsion! You are dismissed."

Like an electric current, an atmosphere of resentment swept over the room. Dull eyes grew bright, and pale cheeks grew red. But no one moved.

"You are dismissed!" was repeated arrogantly.

But no one stirred.

"Professor McQuire," Ray Harrison's voice could be distinguished from the midst of the assembly. She arose to her feet, and speaking in that firm, soft tone, that she had unconsciously imbibed from her guardian, and by which his deepest feelings were characterized, she addressed him "Will you please remember, that we are young ladies of Whitfield College, and not ruffians, and that a request might be as effectual as a threat?"

Then, turning, she walked from the room, followed by the crowd, whose idol she instantly became.

It was one of those cold, drizzly nights, that carry suggestion of ice in their breaths. And, coming on the heels of a long, lovely Indian summer, it chilled the blood and made others, as well as Ray and Reba, seek comfort in an early bed. In fact, long before the usual hour, the lights were turned out, and a ghostly stillness reigned throughout the building.

Just after midnight, without a moment's warning, the old brick structure began to tremble, and the next instant it was in the grasp of "chill November's surly blast," which, like a cohort of formless phantoms, swept through keyholes, as if they were tunnels, and turned the staid old halls of learning into chaotic confusion. Curtains and draperies were torn from their hangings, and tossed about like signals of despair in hands of sprites sprung from some evil sphere. Windows rattled, and doors were well nigh shaken from their hinges.

But still the girls, (some of them) slept on, unconscious of the stormy confusion. Matron and faculty, realizing their impotency, sank deeper into their blankets, leaving the spirits of the wind in undisputed sway.

Then, lo! there came a tap from the college bell, a tap

requiring more strength than all the ghosts in christendom possessed. Directly, in clearer tones, it rang out full and long. One peal after another sounded on the ears of the stupefied inmates before they took in the import of the unusual occurrence, and brought themselves to a realization, that nothing but dire calamity would be heralded from the belfry at midnight. Naturally, with that knowledge came the thought of fire.

Simultaneously a hundred or more struck the floor, and made for the halls. But, the passageways being in darkness, everybody ran into everybody else, with the one cry,

"Where is the fire?"

The word, "fire," brought another hundred to their feet, among whom was Professor McQuire. He had been disturbed from a sound sleep. Rushing from his room in frantic haste, that gentleman, so delicately precise, stumbled over a bucket of water at his door. Kicking the impeding vessel aside, he sprang forward into another, from whence he was precipitated into an inviting tray of flour.

The noise of rattling tinware and the falling body added to the already tense excitement, near to panic, a calamity being only prevented by the appearance of Ray Harrison, who had opened her door, and stepped forth with a bright light in her hand.

"What is the matter?" she innocently inquired, being careful to throw the rays of light on Professor McQuire, who, at that moment, was just arising from the tray, and shaking the flour and water from his bright plaid pajamas.

A loud, hearty laugh rang through the hall.

"Somebody shall suffer for this!" warned Professor McQuire, looking threateningly at Ray. And his warning echoed the deafening cry of "Halloween!"

"Yes, Professor, we have been outwitted," was the president's conciliating confession to McQuire, "so let's take it as a joke." He laughed heartily.

While there was no doubt as to who rang the bell and set the trap for Professor McQuire, no investigation followed.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

## THE CHRISTMAS WEDDING

ON the first day of December Dr. Warren was in his New York hospital office, having just left the operating-room, following the performance of a most delicate operation. The post-man delivered a letter, which filled him with indignation and resentment. It was from his stepmother, who informed him, that he, having had his way in placing Reba in college, left her now, as the girl's mother, an opening for exercise of her own rights.

She had given her consent, following Mrs. Odell's request, to the marriage of Reba and Elbert on the coming Christmas night, in order that Reba might accompany them on their trip abroad. She wrote that it had all been fully arranged, and, while she should like to have his approval and cooperation, she was determined not to be thwarted in her desires.

"All you could accomplish by your opposition," she reminded, "would be Reba's unhappiness. I do ask you to write her and tell her it is all right, and that you will come home for the marriage. She will remain in school until Christmas Eve."

The letter finished, Dr. Warren realized the injustice done him, and, for the first time since early childhood, gave way to impotent rage.

"It shall not be! I will not allow it!"

However, the outburst soon spent itself, and Dr. Warren was himself again, realizing his helplessness.

"But I could not blame Elbert for wanting to take his bride abroad with him. But, how can Mother so readily give up her little girl? She acts as though it were a commercial deal, out of which she were drawing a rare prize."

Alma West arrived in Mooreville on the morning of December the twenty-fourth, and there joined her friends in the depot. Together they reached Sylva late that afternoon.

As they alighted from the train, they hurried to a closed carriage that awaited them, and were rushed off toward The Jessamines. When they had gone about half-way, Bowlegs sprang up behind, and, peeping through the window, inquired,

"Mith Ray, ith you in dar?"

"Yes, how are you, Bowlegs? And what have you been doing?"

"I ith a-been gittin' hollow an' mithletoe fer yo' weddin'."

Ray laughed at Bowlegs' misunderstanding.

"But it is not my wedding. I'm not going to marry."

"You aint agwine ter marry? Den what I been agittin' hollow an' mithletoe fer?" Bowlegs was manifestly resentful.

Knowing that a ruse had been adopted by Mrs. Warren in order to have Bowlegs get the needed decorations, Ray appeased him by saying,

"Oh, you know we wanted to decorate for Christmas. Guess what I've brought you for a present."

" 'Tater bug!" he shouted with glee.

"No, Bowlegs, I couldn't afford to buy you a mandolin, but here is something you will like almost as well." Ray placed in his eager hands a brand new French harp.

"Blow it!" she commanded.

Instantly a loud, discordant note resounded, and a rapturous expression broke over the black face. A few moments later he had mastered "Old Black Joe."

Mrs. Warren, Mrs. Odell, and Aunt Lydia received the three girls at The Jessamines.

"I have just received a message, saying that Dr. Warren would be here in time for the wedding," announced Mrs. Warren.

On entering the large hall, they were surprised to find that the house had been handsomely decorated by an Atlanta florist.

As if by tacit agreement, Alma and Ray stopped on either side of the parlor doorway for Reba to pass in first. But, on reaching the doorway, the bride-to-be suddenly halted. She was confronted by a huge wedding-bell composed entirely of white tea roses, while from beneath hung a sprig of Bowlegs' mistletoe. Throwing her hands to her eyes, she protested, "Not now!" and, rushing to her room, locked the door to shut in her wild joy.

For the next twenty-four hours there was a gentle, sacred stillness pervading the home, that even the Christmas spirit could not dispel. Mrs. Warren had planned every detail of the wedding, and there was nothing more to be done. The ceremony was to take place at eight o'clock on the evening of the twenty-fifth, and to be followed by a sumptuous feast. After this the bridal party would leave on the midnight train for Savannah, and thence to New York, where they would embark for Europe.

Mrs. Warren had arranged to go with them to New York, where she planned to spend several months. In fact, she expected to remain there until Reba's return to America.

Aunt Lydia had agreed to stay at The Jessamines till the following spring.

So perfectly had everything been arranged by Mrs. Warren, that there was no confusion at the last.

"Wake up, darling," whispered Ray into Reba's ear on Christmas morning. "Wake up, and see your beautiful wedding morning. The snow has been falling for an hour. See how gently it rests on the cape jessamine bushes! It is like your white, fleecy veil. No, dear, I'm not crying. But, Reba, darling, I can never see the snow falling again, without thinking of you under your bridal veil."

"Christmas gift!" called Alma, softly, as she stood in nightrobe and bare feet at their bedside. After a lingering kiss for each of them, she continued, "Girls, you have been the only friends of my lonely girlhood. I'm not demonstrative, but deep down in my heart there's a love, a gratitude, the intensity of which only God can know. And here on this Christmas morning, made doubly sacred to us now, I wish to thank you, and to tell you that you have done more than you realize. You were God's messengers to a friendless girl, whom the waves of adversity were about to submerge. Yes, I know you did it from love, but—Good-bye till breakfast." With a tear on her cheek and a smile on her lip, she returned to her own room.

As they were assembled about the dining-room fire, awaiting the late breakfast, a telegram was delivered. It was from Elbert Odell to his "Lady Love," informing her of his departure for Sylva. It concluded with, "Dr. Warren is with me."

## CHAPTER XXXVII

## THE BRUISED ROSE

"COME in," said Reba, in response to a knock at her door, as she and her two bridesmaids stood in her room, arrayed for the wedding.

In stepped a young man in conventional evening suit, as perfect in his attire as if he had just stepped from the pages of a fashion-book.

"Who is it?" was the wordless inquiry on the faces of the girls, as they looked with embarrassment from the newcomer to each other.

Without hesitating, Reba was folded in his arms, but not until they heard his laugh were they sure of his identity.

"Dr. Warren," exclaimed Alma, "you look fifteen years younger!"

"And is youth a thing to be despised, that you all give me this zero greeting?" He looked inquisitively at each of the three girls in turn.

Ray's expression indicated that she was powerless to move or speak. She realized that her cheeks were burning, and that something was swelling in her throat. With a childish impulse, she turned to flee, but the effort was checked by Dr. Warren, who caught her hands in his own, and said, laughingly,

"Ray, I don't believe you know me, yet?"

"Yes, I know you are Dr. Warren, but where is my guardian?"

"Down town in the barber shop, I suppose." Rubbing his hand over his clean-shaven face, Dr. Warren glanced into a mirror, and blushed at the handsome young man that confronted him. The removal of mustache and beard had indeed taken fifteen years from his appearance.

"Dr. Warren," called his step-mother from the doorway, "I wish to speak to you in my room, please."

Turning to follow the rustle of Mrs. Warren's lavender silk skirts, Dr. Warren caught an approving smile on the face of his ward, as she stood arrayed in her first trailing skirts.

"May we come in, and see the bride?" asked Mrs. Odell, coming into the room with Aunt Lydia. "Reba, dear," she continued, " I wanted to give you a lace handkerchief, that my mother and I both carried to the bridal altar. But I've misplaced it. It was in the box with the white slippers. Did you see it, when you put them on?"

"Mrs. Odell, was it in tissue paper, tied with lilac ribbon?" asked Ray.

"Yes, that is it, exactly."

"Then, I know where it is. I saw it on the closet shelf, across the hall." Lifting her light demi-train, Ray went in search of the handkerchief.

The closet she entered was separated from Mrs. Warren's room by only a thin partition, and, as the door was opened, she heard Mrs. Warren declaim,

"And so, at last, you have been found out, and will have to admit that Ray Harrison is a pauper, and has never had a cent with which to pay for the luxuries you have heaped upon her."

For an instant the girl listened for his reply, but none came. Returning to Reba's room, she gave the prized article

into Mrs. Odell's hand, no one noticing the pallor of her face, nor realizing the shock she had sustained—the shock that had instantaneously turned her youth into age and wrapped her in a deadening chill. For, just then, carriage wheels were heard below, creating a flutter of excitement. The two elderly ladies hastily left the room, while the three young girls turned toward the doorway, through which Dr. Warren at that moment entered.

Without a word, he stepped to Reba's side, and lifted her white-gloved hand to his arm. The soft strains of the wedding march were sounding through the house. Alma and Ray took their positions at the head of the staircase, and, at a given signal, moved down the long stairway to the parlor below.

On entering the parlor, a pink flush suffused Alma's olive cheeks, for in the center of the room stood Paul Odell, whose ministerial office could not fortify him against the admiration, that proclaimed itself at her entrance.

The two maids were closely followed by the bride, leaning on Dr. Warren's arm. Stepping forward to receive her from her brother's hand, Elbert manifested a pride, which remained with him throughout the ceremony.

According to the custom of the South, at the period of her social history, the marriage was followed by a sumptuous feast. Placed diagonally across the long dining-room, the table seated about twenty-five guests in perfect comfort.

Throughout the evening Dr. Warren proved himself an entertainer of the rarest quality. The talk was kept running in broad, easy channels, and, except for an occasional banter at the bride and groom, he parried every effort toward individualizing the conversation. He exhibited irresistible

humor, and laughed at his own witticisms, without appearing ridiculous.

However, that new phase of his character was the outgrowth of necessity. Realizing at a glance that his ward was under some terrible strain, and making the effort of her life to keep up, he was endeavoring to protect her from questions, and to shield her from observation.

But, not until the last of the group had departed did Dr. Warren forget the rôle he assigned himself. Aunt Lydia had retired earlier in the evening. So, after closing the doors for the night, he re-entered the parlor to find Ray seated in one of the large armchairs. The unnatural pallor of her countenance in the early evening had given way to a brilliant red, the harbinger of a distressful headache.

"Ray," he appealed at once, "what is the matter? You have looked all evening as if you had seen a ghost."

Without changing her position, she looked up in hopeless despair, and answered,

"I *have* seen a ghost, the ghost of my hopes. I have this night learned that you have deceived me, and now my faith in humanity is gone. Dr. Warren, why did you tell me a falsehood? Why did you assure me that I had property, and would never have to work for my living? Why did you not tell me I was 'a pauper, and have never had a cent with which to pay for the luxuries you have lavished upon me'? Yes, I accidentally heard Mrs. Warren's assertion."

"But, Ray, you never heard me acknowledge this to be true, did you?" He recognized the delicacy of the situation, and was plainly ill at ease.

"No, neither did I hear you deny it. So, please let that part of the awful truth alone, and tell me why you deceived me by your falsehood?"

Taking her by the arm, and drawing her back into the chair from which she had arisen, he remonstrated,

"Ray, I see that deception is no longer possible, but I'm not willing to bear the blame alone. The words you heard Mrs. Warren utter tonight came from her discovery of a letter in one of my old coat pockets. It was from your father, Dan Harrison, whose financial reverses had rendered him unable to provide for you. And, against my judgment, I finally agreed to yield to his wishes, and keep you ignorant of the real conditions. A few months ago, when you appealed to me, I said that it would never be necessary for you to work for a living. And, Ray, it will not. I have provided for Reba, and expect to do as much for you. I promised to treat you as my child, and intend to do so."

"Dr. Warren, you and my father may have intended a kindness, but through your kindness you have blighted my life. I can accept nothing more at your hands, for the sense of obligation is already too heavy."

"Ray, my little girl, my darling, I've something I've been wanting to say for some time, but my position as your guardian has prevented me from doing so. I love you, Ray, and want you for my wife. I want you for the mistress of my home."

Throwing up both hands, and recoiling, she urged,

"Please don't add insult to injury! I would not marry you, if you were the last man on earth! I had rather starve than sell myself. But, since you have done so much to unfit me for the future, I will accept your assistance for the remainder of the school term. Then, when I get my diploma from Whitfield, I'll begin work to repay you the great debt I owe, for pay it I will, so help me, God!"

Dr. Warren turned as white as she had been in the early

part of the evening, but his own suffering failed to blind him to hers. Notwithstanding the awful blow she had dealt him, he looked upon her with pity, and longed to shield her from the anguish he saw in her face. Her lips were quivering, and her eyes sparkling with the delirium of hopeless misery.

"Poor little rose, little bruised rose from the bridal bouquet," he murmured tenderly, as her head dropped dejectedly against the back of the chair, and her hands fell limply to her lap.

"Ray, go to bed, and forget the unpleasantness of to-night," he pleaded with the gentleness of a father.

"And will you allow me to do so as I please after I graduate? " Her thoughts had not left the one subject for a moment. "Will you cease to dictate my course, and leave me to shape my life as I choose?" She was rising to her feet.

Dr. Warren assumed a fine dignity at this last thrust.

"Yes, Ray," he replied, in his characteristic gentle manner, "if such is your desire. But, before this question is closed forever, I must tell you, that I gave you the love of my life. I staked all, and have lost. But I'm still your friend. . . . Good-night, child. Go to bed, and forget your guardian's presumptuous proposal. For, candidly, since learning of your attitude, I've no desire to make you my wife."

For hours after she left him Dr. Warren sat in the midst of the decaying glory of bridal flowers, inhaling their sickening perfume. He tried to rejoice in his sister's happiness, but as well might the prostrate giant oak try to forget its own wreck, and draw strength from the living sapling or blooming violet.

Next morning, when Ray arose, Dr. Warren had left for New York.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

## ABSENCE

DR. WARREN'S renown as a surgeon became greater than ever, and he found much use for the knowledge acquired during his retirement. His busy life, however, could not blot out the memories of the South, and he was annoyed over his inability to adapt himself to his former quarters, and to convince his mind that he belonged in New York, instead of Georgia. As time wore on the feeling of being a visitor did not diminish, but continued to vex him.

At the approach of spring the sweet, subtle influence of the South began to weave its magic web around his thoughts and to draw them back to The Jessamines, over which absence had thrown a roseate veil, banishing dearth and winter, and clothing the old place in perpetual sunshine and flowers. Then, too, there came a time, when he had to acknowledge to himself, that his three and one-half years in the South held the only real joy of his life. And, as "blessings brighten as they take their flight," The Jessamines, the place of his ephemeral happiness, became a sacred image over which he yearned. Bedecking it in the brightest garlands of fancy, he finally made of it a shrine, before which he knelt in adoration.

Like Peter the Hermit, seeking the sepulchre, from which the Savior had arisen and thereby rendered worthless, Dr. Warren enshrined The Jessamines in his heart, not realizing its worthlessness without the being that sanctified it. He

had schooled himself to the belief, that he had resigned his love, and that he could now look upon Ray as his ward and nothing more. However, he soon had occasion to learn, that his efforts in that direction were futile, and that knowledge came with a letter from the president of Whitfield College, which informed:

"As Miss Harrison's guardian, I urge you to exercise your authority in having her desist from a suicidal course of study, which she has assigned herself. Her health, I fear, is already impaired, and, if she persists in the work she has undertaken, I apprehend serious consequences. Were it not for the fact that she is to graduate in such a short time, I should advise you to take her from school. It may be I'm unnecessarily alarmed, but you, as a physician, must understand the danger a girl, not yet seventeen years old, is incurring when I tell you that she studies every night until twelve o'clock, and for the past week she has eaten less than one good meal. She is very thin and pale, so you must advise me of your wishes."

" 'Thin and pale'? My little Ray thin and pale?" Dr. Warren was manifestly concerned and alarmed. His trembling hands folded the white sheet. Such consternation had it brought as to leave him tottering like a drunken man. Sinking into a chair by his writing desk, he penned an answer to the writer in nervous haste.

On the morning following Reba's marriage Ray, having arisen to find Dr. Warren gone, thereby thwarting her intention to apologize for her harsh language and apparent ingratitude, became a prey to remorse. But, instead of writing and begging for pardon, she decided to wait until she had heard from him, which was soon after her return to college. Strangely, however, the wished-for letter failed to invite

her confession. It somehow repelled her, and chilled her sensitive being into silence. So the regret was not expressed, but buried in her heart.

In thinking over her life as Dr. Warren's ward, she blushed with shame over her faults and failures, finally reaching the conclusion that her life was made up entirely of faults and failures. And, with the sense of her own shortcomings, her memory was assailed by the contrasting virtues of her guardian. She wondered how he could love her, or even respect her, and tortured her conscience with—"Now, I've lost both his love and his respect."

With a consciousness of her loss, she realized her own heart was calling for the love that her unhappy words had seemingly destroyed. Understanding, now, her true feelings toward Dr. Warren, her mental vision swept over her future life as separate and distinct from his, and found it a dreary waste, at which she shuddered. However, in Ray's dazed, suffering mind one idea stood out clearly defined—her love must be so effectually concealed, that its object would never suspect its existence. With the purpose to carry out that design, she wrote the cold, impersonal letters, that led Dr. Warren to believe that he had become repulsive to her.

So, with this impression ever in his mind, he, in turn, wrote in a manner that belied his heart, while his unvarying signature, "Your guardian," emphasized her conviction, that he wished her to understand, that he was no longer her lover.

After suffering quite near to insanity over the belief that she had forfeited his love, the girl was on the brink of a collapse. Dr. Warren having wired, "Call at Whitfield College to see Ray Harrison, and let me know if I am

needed," the recipient, a beloved physician of Mooreville, arrived to avert such a catastrophe.

"Dr. Lee, there is nothing the matter with me," assured Ray, after being introduced to the physician, who with the matron had just entered her room, "and I never take medicine!"

"Nothing the matter? Then, what is the matter with this fluttering hand, that I can scarcely hold, and these tears that are welling up in your eyes?" asked Dr. Lee in the delicate way of a good physician of long experience..

"She sits up nearly all night, studying," ventured the sympathetic matron.

"I study to keep from thinking, and because I cannot sleep," retorted Ray, bursting into hysterical tears. "I never took any medicine in my life, except some headache tablets, and I never have headache now." An undercurrent of loneliness played in her tones.

Turning from Ray to the matron, the physician requested,

"Will you please bring me a glass of water?"

When he was alone with Ray, he asked,

"Miss Harrison, what is Dr. Warren to you?"

"Dr. Warren is my guardian. Why do you ask?" she returned with an excitement, that puzzled Dr. Lee.

"I ask," he went on, calmly, looking inquisitively into her tear-stained face, "because he expects me to advise him at once of your condition, which I regret to do, as I'll have to tell him your trouble is mental more than physical, but none the less serious, and that his presence is imperative."

"His presence imperative? What do you mean?" she gasped.

"I mean that you are under some strain, that, if not

removed, will land you in an insane asylum, and that you must turn your back on books and college, and have new scenes and surroundings immediately. And, young lady, that is what I shall wire Dr. Warren before I sleep tonight."

"Oh, Dr. Lee," she cried in absolute panic, "have mercy on an orphan girl, and revoke that decision. I cannot meet my guardian! No, I'm not yet crazy, but will be, if you force me to face Dr. Warren before I have gotten my diploma, and proved myself capable of self-support. Have you a daughter in whose name I can plead for your indulgence?" Dr. Lee flinched at this reminder. "Oh, thank God! I see you have. And, by all the sacred ties of your fatherhood I beg your silence. If you intimate to Dr. Warren, that my health is endangered, he will feel it his duty to come and take me away from college, and that would keep me from teaching school, my only recourse for making a living. I have studied so hard, and with commencement only two months off it would be cruel to rob me of my reward just—"

"Miss Harrison," interrupted the physician, patiently indulgent, "one year ago, just six weeks before her graduation, I buried my only daughter. Useless to say, I grant your petition, though, in doing so I violate my duty to a fellow physician. However, I make one proviso—as he, Dr. Warren, committed you to my care, you must do as I say. Otherwise, the responsibility is too great."

"Oh, thank you, Dr. Lee! I'll carry out your instructions to the letter, but please, unless it's absolutely necessary, don't give me castor oil."

"I sha'n't give you any medicine for the present. I'm going to take you to my wife, my little Ruby's mother, and let her love you back to happiness and health."

Dr. Lee was a trustee of the college, and possessed of a benevolence and Christian character well known to the president, faculty, and scholars of Whitfield, as well as his broad scattering of adherents in Mooreville.

"Well, my little girl," said the president to Ray at their parting, "I'm so glad you're going to have a change, for I was getting worried about you."

"My plan," explained Dr. Lee, "is to bring her to you every day, but, as soon as her lessons are over, I shall claim her again. I believe my wife will soon have the roses blooming in her cheeks."

Dr. Lee's prophecy was only partly fulfilled. The rose that imparted its pink to Ray's cheek was not without its proverbial thorn, which, like memory's needle, pierced her heart with thoughts of the past and longings for what "might have been." The loud, merry, girlish laugh, that Mrs. Warren had designated as coarse and unrefined, and to which Dr. Warren had listened with thrills of delight, pronouncing it untrammeled music, was apparently gone forever. Likewise, the happy, innocent, childlike expression had given place to a fathomless look, that had crept into the dark eyes, proclaiming the arrival of womanhood with its heritage of love and sorrow, and seeming to say, "I have looked upon the tree of knowledge, and found it full of dead sea-fruit, that tempts the eye, but turns to ashes on the lips." But the dark circles under her eyes, so detrimental to the appearance of other faces, imparted to hers a spiritual loveliness.

Mrs. Lee was a lovable, motherly woman, and opened her cheerful heart to the motherless girl, who had brought a happiness into the home that needed her as greatly as she needed it.

"Mrs. Lee," said Ray, at the expiration of her third week's stay, "I won't return from school this afternoon. I leave for Sylva at two o'clock. Tomorrow is my seventeenth birthday, and I have permission to spend it at The Jessamines."

With surprise in her expression and reproach in her voice, Mrs. Lee asked,

"Why this sudden decision to go to Sylva? And your seventeenth birthday? Why, my child, have you not mentioned it before?"

"My dear friend," answered Ray, in tender, apologetic appeal to her hostess, "my decision is far from sudden. I've known for months, that I must spend tomorrow at The Jessamines. And I have not spoken of my birthday, because I wished to forget it, and be happy with you as long as possible. But, since silence will not ward off the inevitable, I admit that its approach fills me with foreboding. No, Mrs. Lee, I can't explain. I only feel that some great event, a crisis in my life, is at hand. Since I could not discuss it with calmness, I have avoided the subject, for my guardian told me years ago, that sensible people, when confronted with difficulties, must fortify themselves by every strength-giving element at their command. So, by your assistance and influence, and the pure, wholesome atmosphere of this home, I've gained physical strength and mental courage for the conflict."

Mrs. Lee listened attentively, somewhat puzzled at the brooding melancholy of her manner.

"Ray, little girl," she returned, consolingly, "do you understand the import of your words? Do you know you are speaking of your birthday, which should be full of joy and gladness, as if it were your funeral?"

"Yes, Mrs. Lee, I fully understand what I'm saying and the strange impression my words necessarily create in your mind. But please excuse me from explaining now. I'll tell you all when I return from Sylva." Ray smiled sadly, as she turned toward the buggy at the gate.

That afternoon the motherless child and the childless mother, in parting at the car door, felt the need each for the other. Throwing her arms around Mrs. Lee's neck, Ray whispered,

"God pity a motherless girl, like—"

"But you are no longer motherless," remonstrated Mrs. Lee, "God sent you to me to take my own child's place, and, henceforth, you are mine. Hurry back to the home and parents awaiting you." Tears and laughter were commingled as she released Ray from a close embrace.

That evening Dr. Lee and his wife were sitting alone in the living-room of their little home, thinking of the girl that had gone.

"Surprised? No, indeed, my dear. On the contrary, it is just what I expected when I brought her to you," said he on being informed of her intention to adopt Ray. "But, before setting your heart on the scheme, I should advise you to consult her guardian, Dr. Warren."

"Judging from his attitude toward her, I think we need apprehend no opposition on his part."

"His attitude? My dear, what is his attitude?"

"Now, Thomas, you needn't pretend that you think Dr. Warren has treated that child right. I haven't heard her say a word against him, but you are obliged to have seen her shudder at the mere mention of his name. And you know, as well as I, that nothing but the grossest neglect, amounting to cruelty, could produce that effect! The very

idea of him, a great big strong man, thrusting a beautiful girl, like Ray Harrison, out into the world to make her own living!" her lip curled in scorn.

" 'Convince a woman against her will, and she's of the same opinion still,' " mused Dr. Lee, with an indulgent smile.

"I'm not averse to conviction. In fact, I'd be glad to know that I am mistaken, for it pains me to think, that she, an orphan girl, has been unjustly treated. So, let me hear what you can offer in his defence."

"My first plea in his defense is, he is absent, and should be given the benefit of the doubt. Next, I see nothing in Ray to indicate neglect, and, so far as I can judge, she has been reared with the most scrupulous care, while her meager references to her life as Dr. Warren's ward all go to prove that she shared every advantage and opportunity that he gave his own daughter. And, again, her love for this Reba, I believe Ray calls her, is truly beautiful, and proved that there was no distinction made between them. And, again, I've heard you say, that her wardrobe indicated a lavish expenditure of money, though, of course, we have no way of knowing from whence it came. Here!" He took a letter from his pocket, and read it aloud. "Is there anything in that to suggest indifference or cruelty? So far as I can judge, no father could manifest deeper interest in an idolized child."

"Yes, Thomas, the letter is all right, but I still insist there is something I don't understand. It may be his wife." She paused in her perplexity. "In fact," with light breaking over her face, "I'm inclined to believe it *is* his wife, for I asked Ray sometime ago, if Mrs. Warren was coming to

commencement, and she said, 'No, Mrs. Warren cares nothing about me, or my graduation.' "

As Mrs. Lee ceased speaking, her husband placed his arm around her waist, and, together, they moved to the open door of the little blue room, back of their own, the room hallowed by the memory of their lost daughter.

"Let's give it to Ray," suggested Dr. Lee, "I'll write Dr. Warren, as soon as she returns from Sylva."

## CHAPTER XXXIX

## THE THUNDER-STORM

"MY dear old home, my home no more," whispered Ray that afternoon, as she entered the iron gates, and passed up the flower-bordered walk of The Jessamines.

Having learned at the station that Aunt Lydia was away for the day, she stopped at the front door, and, involuntarily, turned from the stillness within. Removing her hat and placing it on one of the porch chairs, she went back to the yard. The cape jessamines had never bloomed in rarer profusion, nor imparted a finer fragrance. Neither had the emotional girl, who stood in their midst, ever felt more keenly their narcotic influence. She glided among the blossom-wreathed bushes like one in a trance, and finally stopped near the parlor window. She had broken several of the long-stemmed flowers, and, as she stood with them in her hands, she lifted her head, and looked up to the window above, from which in the past she had so often met the approving smile of her guardian.

Standing thus, her uplifted face, though carrying the marks of sorrow, still possessed its childlike innocence of expression. For the moment the pangs of remorse and unrequited love were banished, and over the parted lips of the girl played a smile. So rapt, so fascinated had she become, that she failed to see the gathering clouds, or to note the darkness that was enveloping her.

With her imagination revelling in the perfumed opulence, she assumed a posture as graceful as that of a poised butterfly.

The moments passed unheeded. Then, suddenly, a flash of lightning and instantaneous peal of thunder gave her a rude awakening. Terrorized, but not fully aroused to her surroundings, she gave a scream, and mechanically turned toward the house, the interior of which had grown as dark as night.

On reaching the threshhold she was blinded by a vivid flash of lightning, and felt the old mansion tremble from the violence of the thunder. She stood transfixed. Another flash gave to the house a ghastly radiance, revealing crevices that her observation had hitherto ignored, and making the old house appear strange and forbidding.

As if impelled by some subconscious prompting, she sprang into the hallway, instinctively crying,

"Dr. Warren! Oh, Dr. Warren!"

"Yes, Ray. I'm here," came from a figure, approaching through the darkened hall, "Compose yourself, child. There is no danger. This is only a summer storm, that will soon be over." Dr. Warren had caught her hands. "Ray! Ray!" he commanded, "shake off this childish fear, and loosen my arm, so I can light the lamp. Sit here," He placed her on a sofa in the parlor.

"Dr. Warren, why didn't you tell me the storm was coming? And, why didn't you let me know you were here?" she demanded hysterically.

After lighting the lamp, and taking a seat by her side, he answered in his quiet manner,

"I supposed you saw the approaching of the storm, and I awaited to inform you of my presence till you had enjoyed the flowers for awhile. I got in just a few moments before you did. My train met yours at Sylva depot, but I got off at the water tank in front of the house. I was as much surprised to see you enter the gate as you were to see me in the hall."

"But, Dr. Warren, tomorrow is my birthday, and you might have known I'd spend it at The Jessamines."

"Yes, Ray, I remembered your birthday, but I had no idea of your intention to spend it here. But tell me about yourself. Are you better? Are you free from pain?"

"I have never had any pain — that is, any physical pain."

Desiring to postpone the subject, that he realized was inevitable, he laughingly said,

"You are still a child, and children know nothing of pain, except physical pain, occasionally."

Gently withdrawing her hand from his own, she returned,

"Dr. Warren, cease trying to deceive yourself. You can never again look into my face, and call me a child. On the night of Reba's wedding I attained a maturity, that has weighed on me like lead." Dr. Warren looked repentent. "No, Dr. Warren, you are not to blame. It is true, that under the first terrible shock of realizing my poverty I, in a way, held you responsible for my misery. But time, even that very night, showed me the injustice I had done you. And I seize this opportunity to ask you to forgive me."

"Ray," he said softly, "I forgave you long ago. Now, forget all of that night's occurrence, for I regret to say, there is another sorrow awaiting you. I've at last heard from the man, Hix. He is to be here tomorrow at noon. He has refused every compromise, that my lawyer could make, and demands The Jessamines. So, it is either to surrender the property, or enter into a long, legal battle. I have not fully decided which to do. But," rising to his feet, "come, Ray, The Jessamines is ours for the present. Let us try to enjoy it for a little while."

Struggling to keep back the tears, she, too, arose, and declared,

"It's a perfect desecration for him, a stranger, who never loved The Jessamines, to occupy it, and call it his home."

Dr. Warren led her to the front veranda, just in time to see the retiring sun peep from under a dark, watery cloud to bid them a bright good-night. Laying his hand on the girl's shoulder, he turned her to the east, and whispered,

"The rainbow."

Without a further word, they gazed till the last vestige of the bow of promise had gone. Then, with brighter expressions, they faced each other.

The next instant the sound of buggy wheels called their attention to the front.

"It's Aunt Lydia and Bowlegs," said Dr. Warren, as they started toward the gate.

## CHAPTER XL

## THE CABINET'S SECRET

"MY children," hesitatingly began Aunt Lydia next morning at the breakfast table, "I shall be compelled to leave you for a little while. I've promised to visit a sick family a couple of miles away. I'd like to leave as soon as Bowlegs finishes his breakfast, so I can return before the heat of the day."

"I'th done done," announced Bowlegs, as his black, smiling face protruded through the open door, "an' de horth ith done hitched."

"Certainly, Aunt Lydia," said Dr. Warren, reassuringly, "No doubt Ray and I will be busy over some important matters, that we have to arrange this morning."

After assisting his aunt into the buggy, and seeing Bowlegs drive off, Dr. Warren turned to his little office in the corner of the yard. Opening his table drawer, he began assorting his papers. Among these he was surprised to find a school girl's half-worn glove. Then, under a package of old letters, he was startled by the sight of a faded pink hair-ribbon. He took it into his hand, and held it with similar emotions to those a mother experiences when confronted by a pressed rosebud from her baby's coffin, so impressed was he by a sense of utter loss.

A half-hour later, in response to a timid knock, Dr. Warren lifted his bowed head, and, turning a white, wearied countenance to the door, he said,

"Come in."

"I came to remind you that this is my birthday, and I'm going to my room to open my mother's cabinet," faltered Ray, as her eyelids fell, and her trembling hands caught the door for support.

"Did you think I had forgotten it?" Smiling, he took from his pocket a gold-lined folding-cup. "This was a gift from my mother to my only brother." And he handed her the cup.

"Thank you, Dr. Warren. You must prize the cup very highly."

"Yes, Ray, I prize it so highly, that money could not buy it, and, therefore, I give it to you. There was only one other like it. My mother had them made for my brother and myself when we were mere boys. This was his. I gave mine away years ago." Dr. Warren appeared reminiscent.

"Of course, I appreciate your gift, Dr. Warren, but it was not a present I craved from you, on this my—seventeenth birthday."

"Oh, I see — my congratulations."

"No, my guardian. My heart is heavy, and I crave your blessing."

And before he realized just what she meant, Ray was on her knees at his feet. As he looked down on her appealing face, she closed her eyes, while from under her dark lashes slipped the tears that she could not restrain.

"Your blessing," she reminded.

For an instant Dr. Warren wavered, and then laid his hand reverently on her bowed head, pronouncing:

"Oh, God, wilt Thou accept this child as Thine own special ward, and give her the peace and happiness, that I would I could but give. Wilt Thou be with her in the sweet, sad task

at hand, and turn her mother's message into a blessing, that will prove temporal, as well as eternal. Amen!"

Then, lifting her from her kneeling posture, he retained his hold of her hand, until they had reached the house to which they straightway turned. They separated quietly in the hallway, Ray going immediately to her room, and Dr. Warren entering the parlor, soon becoming absorbed in his own thoughts.

Presently he took from his pocket a letter from Reba, post-marked, Florence, Italy. Holding it indulgently, he said,

"At last, she is realizing that she is an individual, and not merely her mother's child. I always felt, that my little sister, if given a chance and not dominated by a stronger will, would develop her individuality. And, if Elbert Odell is what he ought to be, he will see that his wife, and not her mother, is mistress of his home."

"Dr. Warren! O, Dr. Warren!" called Ray in a voice of distress, as she came rushing down the stairsteps.

"What is it? What is it, Ray?" Dr. Warren, startled, sprang from his seat to meet her in the doorway.

"O, Dr. Warren, Dad, my precious Dad, was not my father!"

The misery depicted in her face and voice caused him to miss the meaning of her words. Realizing she had received a wound well-nigh fatal, his own heart stood still. In one hand she held the cabinet, and in the other an open letter, while from one of her fingers dangled the cup he had so recently given her.

"What is it, Ray?" he again asked, pityingly, receiving her into his outstretched arms.

"My Dad, whom I loved so well, was not my father," she sobbed.

"Not your father? Dan Harrison not your father? Then who on earth was your father?"

"I don't know. I didn't finish his letter. He wrote, that he opened the cabinet at Mammy Dilsey's deathbed, and slipped into it the confession, that he felt compelled to make. But, Dr. Warren,"she continued, freeing herself from his arms. "I only read a few lines of his letter. Will you please finish it for me, and tell me what it means?"

Dr. Warren accepted the open letter, but, before he could read it, Ray burst into hysterical weeping, and interrupted,

"I cannot! I *will* not have any other father! It is cruel, and I will not believe it!"

The cabinet went to the floor with a crash, and out rolled a silver cup, identically like the one Ray held on her finger.

With surprise, wonder, and consternation, Dr. Warren looked from the floor to her face. But Ray's dazed expression gave no explanation, and, just then, the other cup dropped from her finger, and rolled to the side of the other at their feet.

For a moment Dr. Warren stood with his gaze riveted on the two cups. He then stooped, irresolutely, and took them into his hands. After looking them over reverently, he placed them on the table.

"Will you please read Dad's letter to me?" moaned Ray.

Controlling his own emotion, he read aloud Dan Harrison's letter, in which he reiterated his love for his adopted child, closing with,

"But, Ray, Mammy Dilsey, as well as my own heart, demands, that I tell you the truth as to your real parentage. You

must forgive me, for it was due to the fact that I loved you so greatly that I could not tell you before now. You are the child of my foster-sister, Nellie Talliaferro, and George Nultee."

"The child of Nellie Nultee," repeated Dr. Warren as one in a dream.

Then, as the meaning of it all flashed over him, he cried.

"Ray, do you understand? You are the child of George and Nellie Nultee, and the owner of The Jessamines."

## CHAPTER XLI

## "BALM IN GILEAD"

"DR. WARREN, I cannot take The Jessamines from you. You once said, that you might build a hospital, and locate here. Can't you still do that?" suggested Ray, allowing the momentous revelation of a few moments before, as they sat together under one of the giant oaks, enjoying the cool shade, that ever graced the front yard of The Jessamines.

"No . . . . things have changed, and I could not live here under present conditions." Dr. Warren found it difficult to shuffle off his dreams.

"But couldn't conditions be changed?" she persisted, in a tense voice, at the same time toying with a blade of grass at her feet.

"There is only one condition under which The Jessamines could again be my home, and that is — for you to be my wife."

It was a bold assertion, but met with its proper response.

"Take it on your own terms," came unexpectedly to his ears, as Ray turned away to hide the blush she could not control.

"Don't trifle with me, Ray. You don't know what you say." He looked almost grave, despite her statement.

"Dr. Warren, have your feelings changed, or do you still look upon me as you did last Christmas," she ventured, thinking of his assertion to the effect that he did not care to marry her.

But, Dr. Warren, thinking she referred to his love of her, met her penetrating gaze, and answered,

"My feelings have not changed."

Never did the chilling, devastating breath of ice produce a greater effect on a delicate peach bloom than Dr. Warren's words produced on Ray. The confession of love, on the point of utterance, withered on her lips, and the pent-up passion died, like the embyro peach in the heart of the blossom.

"Dr. Warren," she said, finally, in a tone that sounded strange and far-away, "since your love is dead, and you have no further desire to marry me, I'm determined to tell you the truth, let it cost me what it will. You may call it immodest, if you wish, but nothing makes any difference now. So I say, I love you. And, as I knew it someday would, that love has mastered me. Please do not interrupt me! I demand to be heard! Your love is dead, mine is living. You are as powerless to recall yours as I am to banish mine. For some reason, I've been chosen as the plaything of fate. My love was born, and fanned into flame by the same adverse wind that extinguished yours. On the night of Reba's wedding my love sprang into flame at sight of you as you stood in your evening suit and manly splendor. But up to that time I had looked upon you so completely as my guardian, that I failed to understand the strange new sensation that swept over me. And I never knew for several weeks what it really meant. When understanding came, I was frightened — frightened over the knowledge that I had killed your love. Still I never entirely lost hope of regaining my lost treasure until now. Stand back, Dr. Warren, it would be sacrilege to touch me now!"

Then Dr. Warren, realizing that at last the fates had adjusted things as he would have them, and that her love was a certainty, urged exultantly,

"You have never killed my love, Ray. It lives and

thrives as every moment passes." He seized her resisting form into his arms. "I will now say my say, and I will have my own. Dear, dear Ray. . . ."

She no longer resisted, but naively returned,

I cannot polish stoves and scrub floors."

"But I will take you as you are, and never feel that I've been cheated." After a tender kiss, he released her.

"Dr. Warren, you have straightened out everything else. Now will you please explain why this cup, bearing your name, happened to be in my mother's cabinet?"

"Yes. I gave it to you the night of your mother's death, and the old negro nurse stored it away with the ring and legal papers. I begged the negress to give you to me, but she refused. I wanted you then, and have wanted you ever since. And, now, thank God! you are mine."

Evidencing great joy at his words, she bowed her head into her uplifted hands. Then she requested modestly,

"I want only you and myself to know about my real parents and the threatened loss of The Jessamines, for the home is at last secure, and no one can take it away from us."

Someone was coming up the walk toward them. Presently, a red-haired, coarse-featured man came near, and said,

"My name is Hix, Dillard Hix, and I'm looking for Dr. Warren."

"I'm Dr. Warren, and this," catching Ray by the arm, and presenting her, "is the daughter of George and Nellie Nultee."

"Prove it!" he sulkily demanded.

"The proofs are in the parlor. Come in, Mr. Hix."

As the parlor door closed behind Dr. Warren and "the man named Hix," Ray entered her own room upstairs. Going to

the bureau, she blushed to behold in its mirror the happy, radiant face that confronted her.

"God has been so good to me," she whispered, taking a seat on the window-ledge. "The two things dearest to every woman's heart are now mine — love and home."

And, thinking of all that love and home meant, she forgot the misery of her recent yesterdays, revelling in her present joys. She forgot the existence of Dillard Hix, until she heard his retreating footsteps on the gravel walk below. Just as he reached the gate, she heard Dr. Warren call,

"Mr. Hix, if you wish to go on the Chicago Special, you had better cut across that vacant lot, and catch it at the water-tank, for it is now leaving the Sylva station."

As Mr. Hix disappeared, Bowlegs came driving up at a great rate of speed.

"What have you done with Aunt Lydia?" asked Dr. Warren, anxiously, as the buggy stopped at the gate.

"Mith Liddie thay ter then' de bottle o' thkippernine wine in de wine cheth. Ol' Mith Gwine done tuk a heap worth!"

In a moment Ray came running out with a quart bottle of scuppernong wine, fit for the gods, and, as she reached the gate, she asked eagerly,

"Bowlegs, what is the matter with Mrs. Goins?"

"De doctor tol' her fo'ks dat the 'th got de chronic deezeeze, an' it sho' ter kill her."

On receiving the bottle, the darkie drove off. Looking back with a consequential expression, he informed,

"Mith Ray, Mith Liddie thay fer you ter tell Peachy ter cook de dinner, fer, if Mith Gwine don't git no better, we'll hatter thay dar tel she do. The done had free fit, an I thpeck by thith time she had a hunderd."

## CHAPTER XLII

## EXPLANATIONS

"LET me introduce my guardian, Dr. Warren," said Ray to Dr. and Mrs. Lee, as she and Dr. Warren reached the home of their Mooreville friends on Ray's return from Sylva.

The old couple had been sitting in easy chairs on their comfortably shaded veranda.

"Your what?" asked Dr. Lee, on meeting them at the steps, and giving his hand to Ray, but looking incredulously at the man by her side.

"My guardian, Dr. Warren," she repeated.

"Come in, Dr. Warren, and forgive our seeming rudeness," said Mrs. Lee, leading the way into the house. "The truth is, you are not the kind of man we pictured as Ray's guardian."

"And your letter of recent date led us to believe that you were still in New York," apologized Dr. Lee. "But we are glad to have you with us. How are your wife and daughter?"

Dr. Warren looked embarrassedly at Ray for an explanation, but, finding none, corrected.

"I beg your pardon, Dr. Lee. I have no wife and daughter."

"Reba not your daughter, and Mrs. Warren not your wife" Dr. Lee was, likewise, embarrassed at the puzzling situation.

"Reba is my half-sister, and Mrs. Warren is my step-

mother," Dr. Warren was smiling significantly at Ray. "But I fully understand. Your mistake was a natural one, and your apologies are unnecessary." Then, bursting into a laugh, that dissipated the confusion and put everybody at ease, Dr. Warren continued, "I have never to my knowledge been taken for my mother's husband, but as to being the father of the girls, Reba and Ray, I've become rather used to that, and enjoy the honor."

"Since he has shaved off his whiskers, no one would mistake him for our father. The very idea is absurd," protested Ray, with a resentment, that drew the eyes of Dr. and Mrs. Lee to her face. Then, trying to extricate herself from the embarassing situation, Ray sank deeper into another by announcing, "Dr. Warren is only thirty-seven years old, and anybody with eyes could see that he is too young for my father. Couldn't they, Mrs. Lee?"

Her flaming cheeks proclaimed her secret so completely, that Dr. and Mrs. Lee turned simultaneously toward Dr. Warren.

Then, in a proud, but faltering voice, Dr. Warren assured,

"Yes, we're engaged to be married."

"But, Dr. Warren, you are not going to take her away from us? We love her, too. And Ray is too young," implored Mrs. Lee, with a suggestion of reproach.

"Yes, you are right. Ray is too young to be married as yet, so I've decided to let her spend a year with my aunt in California."

They were seated in the living-room, where Ray had spent so many hours in patient study and steadfast sorrowing. She was now looking quietly at Dr. Warren, who continued,

"But, Mrs. Lee, I appreciate the love you and your husband have given her, and to express that appreciation is why

I'm here. Of course, I regret to take her from college, but, as commencement is so close at hand, I believe they will give her the diploma she has so well earned already. My aunt has been called home on important business, and I thought best for Ray to go with her."

"But, Dr. Warren, do you consider it wise to take her away from the South?" prompted Dr. Lee, earnestly.

"No, Doctor, I do not, and, therefore, I shall come to the South, instead of taking her to the North. I shall close out my business in New York, and locate permanently in Sylva. Ray's affections are centered in our home, The Jessamines, and she could not be satisfied to live elsewhere. Her happiness is now the propelling motive of my life."

Dr. Warren, on looking at his watch, assured them that he must be going.

"But, before leaving, I must draw still further on your kindness," he said, "Will you see that Ray is ready for her trip by day after tomorrow?"

"Yes, Dr. Warren, since she must leave us, I give you my promise to see that she is as well prepared for the long trip as the limited time will allow." And Mrs. Lee gave Ray a gentle hug.

After again expressing his thanks, and bidding Dr. and Mrs. Lee good-bye, Dr. Warren walked with Ray to the gate. They had only a few moments left before separating for an entire year. Ray and his own heart plead for immediate marriage, but judgment said, "Wait," and he did so by putting the temptation clear across the continent.

Dr. and Mrs. Lee, when they saw the couple passing down the walk, faced each other dazedly, and the kindly physician remarked,

"Well, I'll be dad blamed."

## CHAPTER XLIII

## PAUL AND ALMA

AGAIN it was June, a rare, mountain June. The sky was like a canopy of soft, azure satin, and the air as pure and fragrant as a blooming laurel and wild honeysuckle could make it. The gurgling waters of the Noontootely glided through their pebbly channel, with all of the enchanting music of one of Nature's many love songs.

The ground was clothed in a robe of royal purple, with the sweet-scented violets breathing their rarest perfume. Sky, air, water, and earth seemed to be vying with each other in paying homage to the daughter of Joe and Mirandy West, who, after five years of absence, had just returned to her mountain home, accompanied by the Rev. Paul Odell, to whom she had that morning been married in a parson's cottage at Spring Place.

The boy, Jamie, was spending awhile with some friends in Tennessee, leaving the bride and groom together, unmolested by the presence of a third person.

Throughout the first few hours they were very quiet, Alma's mind being drawn irrevocably to the past. But late in the afternoon they walked down to the streamlet below the house, and took a seat on its mossy bank. With her hand clasped in his, and looking fixedly into his firm, bronzed face, she finally said,

"This year has meant so much to me. Just one year ago today I received my diploma, and . . . . met you. Today you

became my husband. I've received so much and given so little. However, I had nothing to give, but myself."

"No king could offer a more acceptable gift than yours. And, my 'Tootley, I ask the Lord, Who shares you with me, to keep me from appropriating entirely to myself your gift." Paul's return to the mountains had brought memories, that intensified the spiritual expression of his countenance.

"But, Paul, all these years I've dreamed of some way helping these, my people, and I'm not quite satisfied in my own great happiness. I want us to establish a small school, where our poor girls can board, thereby saving them the awful discomfort of trudging through these mountains in the terrible winter weather, while going to and from school. There is such a need of it, dear. But, I suppose we shall have to wait — How often I've had to wait for things in my life!—" Alma was almost melancholy in her apparent inability to accomplish what she so much desired.

"Wait? why wait?" interposed Paul, eager to bring her every happiness. "Why not build the school with the money you have saved teaching school, the twelve hundred dollars you have in the bank in Dalton?"

"Oh, no! no! NO!, Paul, a thousand times, no! You have forgotten, that those precious dollars, heaped up by months of effort, are for no other person than my benefactor, the man who came to me in my hour of need. Those dollars belong to him, not myself." She protested patiently, but convincingly.

Paul faced her with a proud twinkle in his eyes. Then he straightened himself up to his greatest height, and, placing a thumb under each of the lapels of his coat, began,

"Then, proud Priestess of Cohutta, look now into the face of your benefactor, for I am he, and surrender into his hands

the money, for the earning of which you cheated him out of his bride for twelve long months."

Alma's eyes filled to the brim. She lowered her head onto his shoulder, and wept for sheer joy. Paul continued,

"Yes, I must have the money! I demand it! Yes, in order that I might return it with a fuller devotion to my wife." He held her more closely, and explained, "I met Brother Andrew in the woods, just after your father had died. I was with your father when he died—had happened along just a few minutes before. Brother Andrew came up a little later. I was anxious to do something to relieve the situation, and Brother Andrew made it possible."

He told her of his stay in the home of her parents, of his spiritual regeneration in the solitude of the morning hour, and of God's call to him to preach the Gospel, which, he declared, came as distinctly and clearly defined as the Voice from the burning bush to Moses on Mount Horeb. He told her all, except that her father was a moonshiner. That fact he and Brother Andrew had resolved to keep to themselves.

For a long while the young husband and wife remained by the clear waters of the Noontootley. There were many questions asked and answered. Finally, Alma, aroused to a realization of the lateness of the hour, reminded,

"You know we have no twilight here in the mountains. As soon as the sun sets, it is night. But we are having the full moon now, and it won't be dark. Come, Paul, dear. . . ."

Leading the way, Alma preceded Paul to the little porch in front of their cabin home. As soon as he had taken his stand by her side, she said,

"Look! The moon is coming up over Laurel Ridge." She directed his attention to an eastern peak, over which a bright silver cloud, rimmed with gold, confronted them.

"Watch, and you will see a picture, surpassing in beauty anything that man has ever produced — a picture, that beggars description, and must be seen from this section to be fully appreciated. Look!" There was something ethereal and unspeakably beautiful in her face. "That bright cloud is like a gorgeous carpet, and those tree-tops — see them lighting up?— are like waving flags, dipped in a lava of gold."

The magnificent light had reached the mountain summit, and turned it into a throne-room of splendor. As the bride and groom waited, almost lost in admiration, the Mistress of the Night stretched forth her magic wand. Darkness vanished. And Cohutta Mountains were bathed in a soft, effulgent light.

## CHAPTER XLIV

## "DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND"

AFTER two months' absence, Dr. Warren returned to Sylva with his architects, and gave instructions for the building of the hospital, which was destined to become the greatest institution of its kind in the South. In compliance with Ray's wishes, he gave no hint of the relationship between themselves. Neither did anyone in Sylva ever know that The Jessamines had ever been in jeopardy.

When Dr. Warren had made clear to his workmen just what he wanted done, he hurried off to his New York duties again. But, having been notified of his sister's arrival in America, he decided to go by way of Savannah, hoping to see her established in the home he had given her.

On leaving the depot, he went immediately to the house, and found its doors open, and white, lace curtains swaying at the windows. Without hesitation, he sprang into the hallway, and called,

"Reba!"

But, instead of Reba, it was Mrs. Warren who came forth to meet him, explaining,

"Reba has not yet arrived from New York, though I'm looking for her every minute. She wired me she would be on the 'Laura,' and that boat was due at the docks a half-hour ago. But," she continued, "while we wait, let me show you the house. This," pointing to a large, airy room to their right, "I have chosen for myself, on account of its connection

with the kitchen, which enables me to give orders to the servants, without leaving my room. The other sleeping apartments are upstairs."

"Very pleasant, indeed," remarked Dr. Warren, nonchalantly. "But I prefer to look at the house later. I won't keep you longer, Mother."

Going back to the front porch, Dr. Warren took a seat, and looked at the little park across the street, where he and Ray had taken refuge from the hotel fire, now many years before.

"Dear little bare-footed girl, I shall never forget you, as you stood against that marble statue, clasping in your shivering arms the little cabinet you had rescued at such a risk." A softening smile lingered in his face.

"There they are," announced Mrs. Warren from the doorway, as a hack stopped at the gate.

Before mother or brother could leave the veranda, Reba had sprung from the carriage, and was rushing up the steps like a whirlwind. She threw her arms around her mother's neck with a scream of delight. Then, making a dash for her brother, she was almost smothered against his breast.

Into her ear Dr. Warren whispered something, that caused Reba to cry with joy,

"I'm so glad! Oh, I'm so glad!" Turning to her mother with another kiss and hug, she asked, "Oh, Mother, aren't you glad that Ray is to be my real sister?"

"I'm at least not surprised, for I long since saw, that Ray Harrison was determined to have The Jessamines. But I do not care to discuss it, and I here and now wash my hands of the whole matter. By the way, Reba, where are Mrs. Odell and Elbert?"

"Over home," pointing to Mrs. Odell's house next door,

"They stopped there. Elbert will be here directly."

A few moments later Elbert came in, and greeted his wife's mother and brother with sincere cordiality. Dr. Warren saw at a glance, that his foreign travel had not been wasted in dissipation and frivolous pleasure.

"Hurry up, Reba! I'm starving!" called the new master of the house, shortly, from the bottom of the stairs.

"I'm coming," she responded. And the next instant he was half-way up the stairs with his arm about her waist. Together they stepped to the floor at the bottom of the stairs, just as the midday meal was announced.

Mrs. Warren stepped forward, and led the way to the dining-room. But, by some dextrous movement, Elbert managed to pass her, and to take his place at the far end of the table. Indecision caused the others to halt.

"Mother Warren, will you please take this seat at Reba's right? And, Dr. Warren, will you please sit here at her left?" directed Elbert with a pleasant smile. Then, withdrawing the chair against which he stood, he seated his wife at the head of the table. Taking a seat opposite, he requested,

"Dr. Warren, will you please return thanks?"

Elbert's eyes twinkled with a secret he held.

"Oh, Reba, I've something important to tell you," he offered. "Alma and the Colonel are married, and spending their honeymoon in the Cohutta Mountains at her home. Isn't it romantic, though? The Colonel has proved himself a fighter even in Cupid's court. Mother found a letter from each of them awaiting her. They are planning big things up there, and say that we must spend our summers with them, and help them establish the school they are starting."

"Oh, won't that be lovely? I'll gladly donate what musical talent I may have," promised Reba.

"Surely your brother has no idea of burying himself in that isolated region?" ventured Mrs. Warren, plainly peeved at the withdrawal of her assumed authority.

"So far as I can learn," returned Elbert, "Paul expects to continue his evangelistic work throughout the remainder of the year, but the three summer months are to be given exclusively to the mountain people—Alma's people, she claims."

"And she will never stop until those people have the Christian and educational advantages to which she thinks they are entitled," commented Dr. Warren.

"The Colonel seems just as much interested as Alma," asserted Elbert, noting with satisfaction that the strained tension was gone. Then, turning back to Reba, he said, "We must not allow our dinner to get cold. Please serve the soup, dear."

By means of his skilful leadership, the conversation was kept up. But, at the conclusion of the meal, there was no doubt as to who should be the mistress of his home.

That afternoon Dr. Warren left the house with satisfaction written over his face and expressed in his buoyant step.

"Where are you going?" asked his step-mother, coming out of Mrs. Odell's home, and meeting him at the gate.

"I'm starting to the boat, which sails in an hour for New York, and I'll have to hurry, for I haven't engaged my stateroom yet."

"I shall only detain you a moment. I wish to tell you, that I've decided to go back to The Jessamines. You know, Reba has been so well trained, that she can manage very well without me. But Ray knows nothing of housekeeping, and I feel it is my duty to take charge of your home, and see that your food is properly cooked."

For a moment Dr. Warren was too surprised to speak, but he finally said,

"Ray and I will not be back at The Jessamines before next spring, or summer. In the meantime, the house is to undergo a change."

"Of course, I don't care to go until I'm needed, which will not be until you are married. And, Dr. Warren, as much as I might reproach you for such a choice, I will refrain from reminding you of Ray's defects. As I've done in the past, I'll continue to look after your comfort."

Bracing himself for the ordeal, Dr. Warren looked squarely at her, and said,

"Mother, my pocket-book is still at your command, but The Jessamines can never again be your home." Lifting his hat, he walked down the street, without a backward look.

The next month he was informed by Reba, that her mother had yielded to the importunities of Major Blanchard, and that they had suddenly married, and left for the Philippine Islands.

As the vision of the little army officer, strutting around in his consequential air, floated before Dr. Warren, he threw his head back, and, with a loud laugh, cried,

"Diamond cut diamond!"

## CHAPTER XLV

## JAMIE WEST

ANOTIIER year had gone by, and Paul and Alma were again in their beloved Cohutta Mountains, and had as their guests, Elbert and Reba.

"I would be glad," said Alma, glancing up the little trail over which Paul had first come into this section, "for Jamie to catch a nice lot of fish. Reba and Elbert have never eaten any of our mountain trout, and I know, when they return from their long ride to and from Dalton, they will be hungry."

Scarcely were the last words uttered, when a slender boy of thirteen years emerged from the thicket beyond the spring. Seeing his sister and brother-in-law on the cliff above, he held up a long string of speckled trout for inspection.

Jamie West had the appearance of being delicate, but, in reality, was as strong as most boys of his age. Possessing the delicate features and blonde complexion of his mother, his face, though not characterized by the strength that marked his sister's, was, nevertheless, that of a student.

The minister and his wife, who had taken him at his mother's death, had begged to keep him permanently, but to this Alma would not agree. She told them, however, that she could permit Jamie to remain in their home, until he was ready for college, with the understanding that he must spend his summer vacations with her in their mountain home. And thus it had been arranged.

Bringing a pan for the fish Paul was dressing, Alma took a seat on the woodpile a few feet away, and said,

"Maybe Elbert and Reba will bring me a letter from Ray, for I've been thinking of her all day. My dear little friend. I do hope her married life will be as happy as mine. And, yet, I know that is impossible, for there can be no other husband like mine. Oh, Paul, don't touch me with those wet hands, and soil my nice, clean dress." Evading his arms, she rushed back to the house, with a gay heart.

They had added two rooms to the rear of the house, and, had arranged for several sleeping apartments. However, there was no effort made to modernize the home. It was Alma's desire to retain it, as far as possible, just as her mother had left it.

"Do you hear nothing yet of Elbert and Reba?" Alma inquired of Paul, as he came into the kitchen with his arms full of stove-wood.

"No, but I guess they will be here by the time you finish frying those fish. If not, they will have to eat theirs cold." Paul laughed as he touched a match to the rich pine in the front-room fireplace. The chill mountain air made a fire necessary in the evenings. The dry wood blazed like oil, and dissipated the gathering shadows.

"'Tootley, I hear them coming," cried Jamie from the wood-pile, dropping his axe, and running toward the house.

"Are you sure? If so, I'll put the biscuit in the stove."

"Yes, I'm sure. I'd know ol' Filly's trot anywhere in the world." He seized the cedar bucket, and ran with it to the spring beneath the cliff.

"Paul, please put the chairs to the table," requested Alma, with a little flurry, as she turned the browning fish, and removed the boiling coffee, whose aroma pervaded every

nook of the house, and insinuated itself into the nostrils of the advancing guests.

"Oh, I fear my biscuits are burning." She stooped down, and peeped into the stove. "No, they are just right." Footsteps stopped in the open door, which, of course, Alma took to be Reba's. So, still bending over the oven, she inquired, "Well, dearie, did you enjoy your ride, and are you ready for supper?"

But, as there was no reply, she stood erect, and, turning toward the door, beheld—Ray Harrison, standing with outstretched arms.

"Why didn't you let me know you were coming?" reproved Alma, playfully, from the enclosure of a tight embrace, and with her voice full of joyful sobs.

"Because I didn't know it myself, until the day before I left. Dr. Warren wrote, that I must not travel alone, and that he could not come for me before July. But Aunt Helen (I don't believe you ever met Aunt Helen) learned by accident, that one of her lady friends was coming to Chattanooga. So it was arranged for me to come with her. And here I am. . . ." Ray broke the embrace, and was removing her hat, when Paul and Elbert came in.

"Of course, the fish are burned up, and the supper ruined," cried Paul, with pretended severity.

"The fish are all right, and supper is not ruined, but little thanks to your wife, the paragon of perfection," laughed Reba.

The final dish of steaming food was removed from the stove, and all took seats about the crude, old-fashioned table, except Jamie, who lingered timidly in the doorway. Then he heard his sister say, "Ray, this is my brother, Jamie," who entered, going to a vacant seat beside Ray.

"Oh, I feel like I'd known Jamie always, and I'm just obliged to kiss him." And the girl drew his head down, and touched her lips to his blushing cheek.

"Hadn't you better pass them on?" suggested Elbert.

"No, sir, not when you held me at arm's length, when I tried to hug you in Dalton," retorted Ray.

"But, really, I did not think you knew what you were doing, and there were so many folks looking on."

"Not know what I was doing? Just to think of my having been away for a whole year, and my heart aching for the home-folks. Then as I alighted from the train, and stood trembling among that Dalton crowd of strangers, when all of a sudden a familiar face appeared, and that face was yours. Yet, you did not think I knew what I was doing? I tell you, sir, I was so glad to see you, that I could have hugged you, even if you had been—Bowlegs!"

"Oh, thank you," he returned, accepting good-naturedly the laugh that he knew was on him.

When supper was over, every one insisted on washing the dishes, but their offers were all declined by Alma, who declared that she had a special reason for doing the job herself. So all of the others repaired to the front room, where a cheerful fire greeted them.

"Sit in this little chair, Ray, and I will tell you its history," said Paul, placing the old bit of furniture in a comfortable place for her. "It's just right for you." Ray seated herself. "It was made by Alma, when she was twelve years old. She sawed the wood, and did the whole thing alone. It is made of white oak, with the bottom of white oak splits. I would not change it for the finest mahogany rocker in Chattanooga. Alma wanted to paint it the other day, but I begged to keep it just as it is."

"Dear little chair," commented Ray.

While Paul was talking, and the others listening, Reba slipped out to the kitchen. As she dried the dishes for Alma, she lowered her voice, and said,

"You must not tell Ray I've been to The Jessamines, for, since Brother has not written her about the wonderful improvements he is making on the place, he must want to surprise her when she arrives. And, wouldn't you love to be hidden, and to see her when she looks on that lovely mansion he has made of it? Then when Bowlegs advances in his white butler's outfit and Peachy appears in the kitchen door with her cook's uniform, I know Ray will be more than satisfied, for she never got used to 'white niggers,' as Bowlegs called our mother's servants."

"Yes," whispered Alma, "I should love to see our dear little Ray, when she enters The Jessamines. How did you say Dr. Warren had furnished her room?"

"In pure white, except for the pink rosebud border around the handsome white wall paper and the same touch of pink in the rich white velvet carpet. It is all a dream of beauty. But the sweetest of all to me is Brother's delight. He is so happy, that it is almost pathetic."

## CHAPTER XLVI

## MOCKINGBIRDS AND MOONBEAMS

"ALMA, I'm through with my work in the house, and, while you finish your baking, I'll go, and get some yellow jessamines for our Sunday decorating," said Ray on Saturday afternoon, just three weeks after her arrival from California.

"Very well, dear, but you know that Jamie went with Reba and the men-folks to the picnic."

"Oh, I'm not afraid to go alone, and you need have no apprehensions about my getting lost, for I'll follow the creek to the flowers I found a few days ago."

Alma followed Ray to the porch.

As the last flutter of the pink gingham dress vanished around the winding path, Alma began to soliloquize,

"My darling little Ray, your development has been marvelous. I have no further fears of your future, and your hands have proved that their dimpled whiteness is no barrier to their usefulness. And, Reba, dear little lamb, how you have changed for the better. No more the wavering, dependent girl, but now the well-poised, self-reliant woman. How beautifully you have met the responsibilities of wifehood. God give you grace now to meet the deeper, sweeter responsibilities of motherhood."

Alma's lips closed, but her eyes lit up with a prophetic light, as, dreaming, she stood leaning against a rustic porch column. She saw little children, as they played around the

cabin door, and her mind's eye rested on the flowers they held in their tiny hands. She heard their little voices, as sweet as the songs of the birds with which they blended, calling to one another in playful unaffectedness.

Then the face of Joe West's daughter took on a deeper spiritual beauty, and became radiant with a fuller visionary glory. She had found another crevice through which she peered into futurity, beholding the mountain-side covered with cottages, that clustered around a central building, which she recognized as the nucleus of a college community.

Gradually the central structure changed, assuming the appearance of a great hospital, with many white cots, among which walked Dr. Warren, with pity in his face and healing in his hands. Again, in her dreaming, the panoramic picture took another shape, and a splendid tabernacle appeared, with a mighty congregation assembled therein. There was in their midst a clearly defined altar, around which knelt sobbing, sin-sick penitents, while above them, with his face lifted to God, stood her husband, Paul Odell.

The picture was assuming intensified vividness. Finally, she saw spring from his knees, out of the midst of the penitents, with the smile of heaven in his face, a mountain youth. By his side, holding his hand, was Brother Andrew, whose clear voice announced, "I have found my brother, Peter, and this is he!"

"Jamie! My brother, Jamie!" sobbed Alma, falling into a chair nearby.

The spell was broken, but the trembling, pale-faced woman knew that she had looked upon things, that, if not unlawful, were, at least, inexpedient for her to tell. So, in silence, she stored them up in her heart. Alma knew she had had an experience—call it dream, trance, or vision

—too sacred for the eyes of an incredulous world. Thus, she hid it away to protect from the rude breath of criticism and from the unhallowed touch of those who could not understand.

But that night, when the home was wrapped in slumber, she arose from her bed, and tiptoed to Jamie's cot. The moonbeams played over his face, giving to his delicate features a striking resemblance to the little mother they had loved and lost. Wiping the tears from her eyes, Alma rested her hand on his brow, and whispered,

"My mother's baby, my mother's man, God has chosen you for a great work."

. . . . . .

Surrounded by the long vines of yellow jessamines which she had gathered, Ray was sitting on a log at the brink of the streamlet, just a short distance from the house. She had left Alma some hours before, and now it was late afternoon. Sinking her face into a cluster of the sweet-scented flowers, she said aloud,

"You darling little yellow beauties, I just had to get you, even if I did tear my dress and hurt my hand."

Unwinding the long, flowering vines, she placed one end in the water at her feet and the other she laid carefully back on the mossy bank. Being in perfect harmony with her surroundings, Ray Harrison was supremely happy. The running water interested her, while the perfume of the woods eased her senses. Time ceased to be a factor in her thoughts, and the moments glided by unheeded.

Then the deep, trembling voice of Dr. Warren at her rear called her name, and she recognized, with a start, its mellow tone. Their greeting was fervid and beautifully sincere.

For a few moments, following some preliminary questionings, they sat exulting in the pure joy of their being together.

"This will be your last day in the hills, Ray," said Dr. Warren, finally, drawing her closer to him. "At midnight we leave Dalton for The Jessamines."

"Oh, Dr. Warren, to be again there with just ourselves, and with Bowlegs and Peachy to wait on us! But, does Alma know of your coming? And, is Paul ready for the ceremony?"

"Yes, everything is ready. I came by the cabin on my way here. At last, Ray, all is ready."

As they reached the cabin door, Ray suddenly stopped, and, pointing to a gorgeous bank of mountain laurel and yellow jessamines in a corner of the front-room, gasped,

"Our bridal altar!"

"Yes, are you afraid?" asked Dr. Warren, placing his arm protectingly about her.

"Not if you will hold my hand."

With expectancy beaming in their faces and manifesting itself in their behavior, the inmates of the cabin awaited their arrival.

A half-hour later, at a signal from the stroke of the clock, the two dressing-rooms opened, and from them stepped all, except Ray, who stood waiting to be led forth by the bridegroom.

Just as the sun was sinking behind a western ridge, diffusing through the open windows a rich, golden glow, Dr. Warren and Ray Harrison walked across the large room, and, turning with their backs to the flower-laden corner, were confronted by Paul Odell in his full ministerial regalia.

There was no wedding march, but through the late

afternoon silence was wafted the subtle, low, murmured march of the water in the streamlet below.

For a full moment after they took their position, there was absolute stillness. As they stood in the midst of those who loved them and whom they loved, Dr. Warren and his mate looked out unafraid. They were each consecrating on the marriage altar their first and only love.

Dr. Warren wore a dark blue tailored suit, that accentuated the perfection of his manly physique. He was clean-shaven, and his strong, clear-cut features were so softened, that his face was almost boyish. Ray's symmetrical little figure was clad in bluish gray. The dainty gray turban had, with its one cluster of pink rosebuds, nestled down on her dark, wavy hair with a caressing touch.

The impressive Episcopal ceremony was used, and it was the wedding-ring of Ray's little mother that Dr. Warren placed on her finger. As he did so, there was a slight quiver of her lips.

The ceremony drew to its close as the departing sun withdrew its last rosy tint. On its disappearing behind a western ridge, there would have been darkness had it not been for a softer glow, that crept into the room, baptizing it in a halo of glory. The full moon from over an eastern peak had burst forth in all of its peculiar splendor.

As Paul Odell said, "I pronounce you man and wife," Dr. Warren and his bride were enveloped in a mantle of moonbeams, that lowered around them like a benediction. And, simultaneously, a mockingbird from a nearby tree trilled out its congratulations in a melody of ineffable sweetness.

THE END

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